TRANS*LITERACIES: DESIGNING FOR GENDER FLUENCY AND TRANSMEDIA LITERACY IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

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Jenna M. McWilliams

Trans*Literacies: Designing for Gender Fluency and Transmedia Literacy in the Elementary Classroom

This dissertation is about transforming the social in order to achieve increased support for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA), but it is equally about dismantling misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia so that all people, regardless of their sexual or gender identity, can be free. Cultural expectations about gender are folded into, for example, the spoken and tacit rules for how women and men, girls and boys, should dress and carry their bodies and engage with others and make decisions about relationships, family, and careers. These expectations are also implicit in larger symptoms of cultural dysfunction, as in ongoing efforts to silence, bully, intimidate, and threaten women who speak up against sexism in video games and other popular media, as well as in cultural messages about masculinity that lead male-identified people to distance themselves from their emotional experiences and to engage, often unreflectively, in aggressive and sometimes violent behavior toward others.

Despite overwhelming evidence that binaristic views of gender are insufficient for describing the spectrum of identities and range of gendered experiences that constitute daily life, the fiction of the gender binary persists. In America, all children are assigned one of two genders at birth and they are surrounded by and begin to internalize binaristic assumptions about gender, gender norms, and gender appropriate behavior within the first few years of their lives. These binaristic assumptions not only work against the best interests of those children and adults who identify as transgender or gender variant, but they also constrain all individuals' opportunities to explore and develop their intellectual, emotional, vocational, and social identities.

At the core of this dissertation is an intervention designed to support late elementary (4th and 5th grade) students in challenging the fiction of the gender binary. Working with performance-based activities, projects that called for students to critique, appropriate and remix gender-focused transmedia narratives, and written and oral reflections on personal experiences with gender, the study aimed to support the development of trans*literacies: the skills, practices, and beliefs needed to negotiate and challenge gender norms across multiple media platforms. Drawing on queer and transgender theory, transmedia theory, and sociocultural and poststructuralist theories of literacy, learning, and identity, this study aims at contributing to a growing body of research on teaching about gender diversity in the formal classroom and at offering insights into how to support learners in developing more reflective forms of gender expression as they move toward adolescence.

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Chapter One
Introduction

The first emergency that drives this dissertation is the need to create livable educational spaces for queer bodies. The project of this dissertation is to confront societal norms around gender, gender identity, and gender expression in order to open up spaces for children and adults to interrogate and explore their relationship to their own and others' genders.

The project of this dissertation is to transform the social order with the aim of achieving increased support for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA), but it is equally about dismantling misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia so that all people, regardless of their sexual or gender identity, can be free. Cultural expectations about gender are folded into, for example, the spoken and tacit rules for how women and men, girls and boys, should dress and carry their bodies and engage with others and make decisions about relationships, family, and careers. These expectations are also implicit in larger symptoms of cultural dysfunction, as in ongoing efforts to silence, bully, intimidate, and threaten women who speak up against sexism in video games and other popular media, as well as in cultural messages about masculinity that lead male-identified people to distance themselves from their emotional experiences and to engage, often unreflectively, in aggressive and sometimes violent behavior toward others.

This cluster of social ills is rooted in what Garfinkel (1967) referred to as the "normals" view of gender: The belief that there are two, and only two, gender categories; that all people, with very few exceptions, fit neatly into one of those two gender

categories; and that all people, with very few exceptions, fit neatly into the gender category they were assigned at birth.

Despite overwhelming evidence that dominant assumptions about gender, linked to this "normal" view, constrain people's intellectual, emotional, vocational, and social lives, only the most limited efforts have been undertaken to challenge these narratives with students in formal educational contexts. This is particularly true at the elementary level, where it is often assumed that children are not sophisticated or mature enough to engage in a systematic inquiry into societal norms and related social inequities (e.g., Bigler, 1999). Yet a growing body of research makes it clear that children begin to internalize dominant beliefs about gender as early as preschool (Martin, 1998, 2009) and that these beliefs, if left unexamined, may solidify and become accepted as unquestioned fact well before puberty (Davies, 1989; Wohlwend, 2012a, 2012b). Further, recent work with young children suggests they have a greater capacity for abstract reasoning and engaging with sophisticated concepts than is typically assumed; that, in Bruner's (1960) words, we can "begin with the hypothesis that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development'. (p. 33). Empirical work with young children has demonstrated that they are perfectly capable of learning about, for example, complex systems (Danish, 2013), physics (Hammer & Elby, 2003), and the contested and complex narratives of world history (S. R. Goldman, 2004; Hogan & Weathers, 2003).

Recent research into curricular interventions surrounding societal norms and individual, social, and institutional biases suggests that children are also capable of engaging in sophisticated inquiry into race and racism (Tatum, 2003; Van Ausdale &

Feagin, 2007), sexual orientation and heterosexism (Ryan, Patraw, & Bednar, 2013; Sapon-Shevin, 1999; Swartz, 2003), and gender and sexism (Bryan, 2012; Ryan et al., 2013). Appropriate scaffolds, and activities sufficiently tied to children's lived experiences, these studies suggest, make it possible to engage in the work of building theories about the world and its social structures even in elementary school.

This dissertation brings the issue of gender diversity to late elementary (4th and 5th grade) learners, focusing on teaching them to develop strategies for critiquing and challenging problematic cultural norms surrounding gender, gender expression, and gender identity. The study described in this dissertation is built around the following premises:

- It is important—even necessary—to support learners in deconstructing socially accepted norms about gender and, indeed, the ability to engage critically with gender is for many children no less than a question of survival.
- Elementary-aged children are quite capable of interrogating societal norms—even norms as complex and deeply enmeshed across social structures as those surrounding gender—when provided appropriate cultural tools to do so; and
- Appropriate cultural tools for interrogating gender include transmedia narratives and platforms, which can enable learners to develop an attunement to, appropriate, and reinscribe messages about gender in a personally and culturally meaningful way.

- The ability to engage with media messages about gender is built on three categories of activity: creative, critical, and performance-based engagement.

The need to address gender diversity in schools

The study driving this dissertation reaches beyond issues of sexism and gender inequality that comprise the vast majority of educational interventions that directly address gender as a topic of inquiry (Chung, 2007; Freedman, 1994; Hobbs, 2004; Kang, 2013; Rouner, Slater, & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003). Although these are important issues to address with learners, they tend to rely on binaristic, essentialist assumptions about what constitutes gender and gender identity, and they therefore fail to fully support learners in developing a theory of gender that accounts for the diverse forms of identity, performance, and expression that comprise all individuals' daily experiences of the world (Heffernan, 2011; Ryan et al., 2013). To that end, this dissertation takes up what I call "the fiction of the gender binary"—the persistent belief that the world can be divided into two, and only two genders, and that anyone who does not fit fully into one of those two gender categories is an anomaly or a freak.

The corrosive and coercive effects of the fiction of the gender binary begin before children are given a choice in the matter. In America, all children are assigned one of two genders at birth and begin to internalize cultural assumptions about "gender appropriate" behavior even before they begin to talk (Martin, 2009). In addition to the overt and subtle messages about gender norms communicated by parents, siblings, and teachers (Martin, 1998, 2009; Wohlwend, 2012a), messages about how to appropriately express one's gender are communicated through the material resources that populate childhood:

television shows and movies (Gauntlett, 2008; Gill, 2007; Wohlwend, 2012b); color-coded clothes and toys, with their gender-specific designs and intended uses (Goss, 1999; Pollen, 2011); technologies (Calvert, 1999; Cassell & Ryokai, 2001) and storybooks (Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Peterson & Lach, 1990). The effectiveness of these tools in mediating children's awareness and reproduction of gender norms is apparent in the speed and ease with which even toddlers begin to police the gendered behavior of their peers and themselves (Davies, 1989; Martin, 1998; Ryan et al., 2013).

Gender policing can shift into bullying. Recent research suggests that the most frequent victims of bullying in K-12 schools are gender variant children: Those whose clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms, or other forms of self expression diverge from accepted norms for their assigned gender (Limber, 2012; Meyer, 2009). Moreover, cultural norms about gender restrict all children's opportunities to explore and express their developing identities, regardless of the extent of their real or perceived gender variance (Brill & Pepper, 2013; Ehrensaft, 2011).

Challenging the fiction of the gender binary by teaching students about gender diversity, then, is a social justice concern not only for the estimated one in 500 American children who are "significantly gender variant or transgender" (Brill & Pepper, 2013, p. 2), and for the 4-6 percent of children who exhibit "gender variant behavior" (Hein & Berger, 2012; Van Beijsterveldt, Hudziak, & Boomsma, 2006), but for all learners, regardless of their gender identity or expression. To date, however, little empirical work has offered effective strategies for teachers who hope to implement pedagogies of gender diversity, and most research is limited to efforts to counteract bullying based on real or perceived gender variance (Meyer, 2009).

Building on a theoretical framework that integrates queer/transgender theory and transmedia theory, this study embraces the treatment of gender as a social construct through which all forms of identity and expression are interpreted and made legible (Bornstein, 1994; J. Butler, 2004; Foucault, 1979). Because of the pervasive, persistent, and increasingly (re)inscribable nature of the transmedia format (Kinder, 1993; O'Halloran, 2009; Scolari, 2009a; Shirky, 2011), it was selected as a key avenue through which gender can be constructed, explored, and at times challenged or resisted.

Through the design, implementation, and analysis of a curricular intervention that emphasizes gender diversity, the study offers principles for supporting *gender fluency*, or a set of skills and dispositions that enable a learner to identify and critique assumptions about gender; and *transmedia fluency,* defined as the set of skills and dispositions that enable a learner to follow, critique, and inscribe messages across multiple media platforms. Taken as a cluster, these fluencies make up what I label *trans*literacies*: the skills, practices, and beliefs needed to negotiate and challenge gender norms across multiple media platforms. Through work with late elementary (4^{th} and 5^{th} grade) learners, this study also aims to offer insights into how assumptions about gender are internalized before and during the early stages of puberty, and how to support learners in developing more reflective forms of gender expression as they move toward adolescence.

Study goals and research questions

This study aims at supporting learners in understanding how gender is constructed and normalized, and in exploring strategies to critique and rewrite those constructions through transmedia platforms. The focus of inquiry, both in the intervention design and in the analytic framework, works at the intersection of gender and transmedia, where

practices that I label *trans*literacies* emerge. The study aims to support learners in adopting multiple performative positions with regard to their gendered identities, and in communicating these multiple positions through media platforms. The study integrates scholarship on learning with and from transmedia narratives and literacies, queer and trans* gender theory, and an activity theoretical framework that takes tool-mediated activity (i.e., movement over time) as its unit of analysis, in order to address the following questions:

- **RQ1:** How does a curriculum integrating a trans*theoretical framework impact students' awareness of and ability to articulate the ways in which gender operates in their lives?
- **RQ2:** What shifts in transmedia practices emerge through implementation of a gender-focused curriculum that interrogates how gender is expressed and normalized across media platforms?

At the core of this dissertation is a ten-week, approximately 20-hour intervention that I have labeled the Trans*literacies Project, and that was designed to address the research questions above. The Trans*literacies Project is so called because of its emphasis on the combined literacies of gender interpretation and expression, and of transmedia analysis and creation.

Outlining this dissertation

This dissertation draws on queer and trans* theoretical frameworks—two important branches of poststructuralist thought that are not well understood or commonly used in education in general and in the Learning Sciences in particular. I therefore devote a significant section of my literature review to defining queer and trans* theory, detailing

their applications so far to theories of learning and to pedagogical approaches. In chapter 2, I describe the theory of gender that emerges from these theoretical frameworks and that I have adopted in theorizing learning and as my theoretical underpinning in the design, implementation, and analysis of my study.

I also devote space in chapter 2 to framing gender fluency as a new media literacy skill, providing a miniature case study of the well known drag queen Sharon Needles to describe how gender performance engages the new media literacy practices of appropriation and remix. Because this dissertation draws as well as research in transmedia studies and media literacy research, I also describe prior work in these areas that support the design and implementation of my study. A key feature of this dissertation is an emphasis on the performative nature of gender and on performance as a new media literacies skill, so the analysis of Sharon Needles is intended to illustrate why and how this aspect is an area of focus in a dissertation emphasizing media and gender.

In chapter 3, I describe my application of the theoretical and methodological commitments of queer/trans* and transmedia theory in the design and implementation of the trans*literacies intervention. The intervention was developed using Sandoval's (2004, 2014) embodied conjecture approach to educational design, and in this chapter I describe the primary features of the trans*literacies intervention and the theoretical principles and conjectures about learning each was intended to embody. In this chapter, I also situate my research site, drawing on the principles of nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2007) and Mediated Discourse Analysis (Jones & Norris, 2005b; Scollon, 2001b; Wohlwend, 2013) to do so. Because nexus analysis and mediated discourse analysis call for the researcher to begin by identifying the routines of relevance to the phenomenon or phenomena of

interest, I devote space in this chapter to detailing some of the most prevalent gender-focused and transmedia-focused routines that were positioned as common, normal, and appropriate at my study site.

In chapters 4 and 5, I describe shifts in students' patterns of analyzing and representing gendered media messages. I detail how three curricular features enabled me to identify initial patterns in identifying and remixing media messages about gender, then to target shifts in how students engaged with media in interrogating gender norms, and finally to identify new patterns that emerged by the end of the intervention. Briefly, students at the outset of the trans*literacies intervention tended to reflect dominant cultural beliefs about gender, including beliefs that gender is a binary and that gender and biological sex are interchangeable concepts. By the end of the intervention, students were identifying and challenging binaristic assumptions about gender and were increasingly aware of the variety of societal norms that reinforce this binary.

In chapter 6, I focus on the performance-based aspects of the intervention, describing how these worked in concert with the creative and critical approaches to engaging with gendered media narratives. A key principle of the trans*literacies intervention was that gender is a performative endeavor—and, as a companion principle, that gender variance is therefore a common, shared experience. These notions were crucial to the intervention but extremely challenging to implement in the classroom. In this chapter, I detail the mix of success and failure that comprised my efforts to help learners embrace this aspect of the trans*theoretical framework for theorizing gender.

In chapter 7, I detail some of the implications of my study and findings. In particular, I describe the importance of integrating performance-based activities into a

media literacy framework, arguing that my findings illustrate that performative literacy is a literacy of new media as well as a literacy of gender. I also outline some of the major challenges that emerged through the implementation of this intervention: Namely, my tendency—and the tendency of the methods and theories of educational research—to reinforce the gender binary and masculinity in particular. In this chapter, I also offer a brief rationale for the inclusion of queer and trans* theory within the learning sciences.

I end this introductory chapter with a disclaimer, in the form of the story of the sex researcher John Money. Money was apparently the first to propose a distinction, in the late 1950s, between sex and gender (Money & Ehrhardt, 1972; Udry, 1994). In a series of articles published beginning in the 1970s, Money argued that while sex was biologically determined, a person's gender—the ways in which individuals express their biologically determined traits—is learned through socialization into cultural norms. Money's argument drew on the infamous "John/Joan" case of a child ("John") who was born with a penis but was raised as a female ("Joan") after a failed circumcision (Money & Ehrhardt, 1972; Stryker, 2009). On Money's advice, John/Joan's testes were removed and as John/Joan approached puberty, doctors began to administer estrogen to promote breast development and other secondary sex traits.

In publications and public talks, Money presented Joan as an exemplar of the power of nurture to trump nature: Joan was a person whose gender was not born but made. Joan, at age nine, was so perfectly feminine that Money suggested nobody could ever guess that she had been born with a penis:

> Eventually she will inevitably be told about her medical history, which is too well known by relatives for a realistic expectation of permanent secrecy. No one else knows that she is the child whose case they read of in the news media at the time of the accident. Nor would they ever conjecture. Her behavior is so normally that of an active little girl, and so clearly different by contrast from the boyish ways of her twin brother, that it offers nothing to stimulate one's conjectures. (Money, 1975, p. 71)

Money trumpeted the Joan/John case as a complete success, using it to argue against the prevailing wisdom of the time that a person's gender is determined wholly by biology. Money argued that while *biological sex* is linked to sex traits including reproductive organs and hormones, *gender* is a cluster of primarily learned behaviors that reflect social norms (Colapinto, 2013; Money, 1975).

John/Joan's real name was David Reimer. He went public with his version of his story in 1997, when he learned that Money had built a career on proclaiming triumph in the 'making' of Joan. Reimer tells a different story: He never felt like a girl, was drawn even in childhood to traditionally masculine activities (including playing with guns and urinating standing up), and hated the way his body developed in response to female hormones. At age 14, he refused outright Money's recommendation of vaginal construction surgery and told his parents that he would commit suicide if they forced him to continue visiting Money's clinic. His parents took him to a new team of doctors, who offered David support for living as a boy (Colapinto, 2013). David requested, and received, male hormones; he underwent surgery to remove his breasts and construct a phallus (J. Butler, 2004; Colapinto, 2013).

David Reimer—the confounding boy without a penis—was forced to wear dresses because social structures could not tolerate the notion of a man who lacks a phallus. Money insisted to Reimer's parents—people he winkingly described as "young people of rural background and grade-school education" (p. 67)—that the only choice for their

child was for him to assume life as a girl. Reimer himself seemed, contradictorily, to both reject this path and echo Money's assumption that a boy without a penis is no boy at all. Colapinto (2004) notes that Reimer expressed anxiety throughout his adult life that he could never completely fulfill his wife sexually. As an adult, Reimer struggled in his marriage, had trouble keeping a job, and never fully shook his childhood experiences at the hands of Money's research team. After two failed suicide attempts in his 20s, he successfully ended his life in 2004, at age 38 (Colapinto, 2004).

I include in this chapter the admittedly sensationalist account of David Reimer, "the boy who was raised as a girl" (Colapinto, 2013), to underscore a crucial point about those who theorize about gender: While gender may well be viewed as a socially constructed fiction—and, indeed, will be treated as such throughout this dissertation—it is also a very real lens through which we experience our lives. Theories about gender, whether developed by philosophers, sexologists, queer theorists, or learning scientists, have a very real impact on very real people. Gender is one 'structure of intelligibility' (J. Butler, 2004; Foucault, 1980; M. J. Shapiro, 1992) used to 'read' others and to 'write' ourselves; the ways in which we theorize gender, then, implicate us all to the extent that our theories efface, omit, and obliterate those whose lives are not rendered intelligible by our theories. Butler (2004) exhorts readers to "consider for the moment the ambivalent gift that legitimation can become": Any act of rendering legitimate a previously illegitimate existence "will take place only through an exclusion of a certain sort, though not a patently dialectical one" (p. 105).

I therefore proceed with extreme caution in theorizing gender and applying these theories to the everyday educational lives of children. Although the theories I propose

here are intended to render intelligible a broader spectrum of gendered lives—to render intelligible more people, and therefore to ease somewhat the burden they bear in being heretofore unreadable by social structures and cultural norms—I also attempt to remain excruciatingly mindful of the evil that can be wrought by manipulating social structures. The stakes of tinkering with gender norms are high. This was evident to me immediately as I began to talk about gender with the 4th and 5th graders participating in my study, evident in the energy and emotion the children brought to gender-focused classroom activities. Even at age 9 or 10, children can articulate, very clearly, the ways in which gender constrains and defines their experiences; even at age 9 or 10, children are aware that their genitals organize their lives. My goal, then, is to build a theory of gender that makes possible new experiences, new ways of operating in the world; my goal is to help to build a world of increased possibility.

Chapter Two

Review of Relevant Literature

This review of literature aims to achieve several goals. First, in this review I attempt to provide a brief and comprehensive review of queer and trans* theory, the frameworks driving my study design and analysis, as well as to discuss their applications so far in the field of education. Because queer and trans* theory are not well understood across the social sciences, and even less so within educational research, it is important for me to lay out the important issues and to establish the ways in which queer/trans*theory position me to address the questions that drive this study. Second, I discuss areas of overlap between queer/trans*theory and scholarship in transmedia studies and new media literacies. This is important because I aim to establish gender fluency as a new media literacies skill, very much in line with the new media literacies practices of appropriation, negotiation, and performance. Third, I identify gaps in the research in queer/trans* studies, transmedia studies, and efforts to integrate these into educational research, identifying the contribution I intend this dissertation to make to these disciplines as well as to the broader field of educational research.

Rationale for Inclusion / Exclusion of Literature

In line with Boote and Beile's (2005) call for dissertation literature reviews to explicitly articulate a rationale for inclusion and coverage, I begin by outlining my approach to conducting this review and determining which branches of gender-focused scholarship are sufficiently relevant to justify inclusion.

Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of gender focused scholarship

Scholarship on gender and learning is vast. This is particularly true because my theoretical reach extends across the fields of literacy and media literacy, transmedia studies, the learning sciences, and gender studies. As I describe in greater detail below and in chapter 3, this study is built around the premise that disrupting dominant discourses about gender can be engaged through media literacy activities that facilitate engagement with alternative gender narratives across media platforms. I therefore looked to scholarship in queer and transgender studies in order to establish the theoretical grounds of this dissertation, as well as scholarship in the social sciences to root this work in empirical study. Although this work has been undertaken in a variety of formal, informal, and semi-formal learning contexts, my study was located in a formal classroom setting and faced particular concerns not common in scholarship in out-of-school contexts. I therefore focused my review of literature primarily on interventions conducted in formal classroom settings. I found that these efforts were not limited to any single disciplinary area but extended instead across the academic domains that populate most formal educational settings.

In reviewing prior work addressing gender-related issues in education, I identified three fairly distinct strands of scholarship—each embracing a distinct, if often unarticulated, theory of gender. The first strand, which might be labeled the "core gender identity" approach, generally embraces positivist and rationalist perspectives on learning, cognition, and development. This approach treats gender as largely equivalent to biological sex and is primarily interested in cognitive, physical, and psycho-emotional differences between boys and girls and men and women. The core gender identity strand takes gender to be embedded in individuals' cognitive and physiological traits and tends

to explore, for example, gender-based differences in spatial thinking or language skills (K. R. Browne, 2004; Cosgrove, Mazure, & Staley, 2007; Fogg, 2005; Halpern, 1997, 2013). This approach also draws on research in cognitive science, endocrinology, neuroscience, and evolutionary psychology to, for example, frame women as "naturally" more nurturing, peaceful, and emotional than are their "naturally" more aggressive, rational, and dominant male counterparts (Buss, 1995; Pease & Pease, 2004; Schmitt, Realo, Voracek, & Allik, 2008). To the extent that this strand takes an interest in addressing gender inequities, it does so by identifying the most effective strategies for supporting girls and boys, women and men, in engaging in gender-appropriate academic, vocational, and social pursuits. At various points in cultural conversations about gender inequities in STEM disciplines, those who argue that women are innately less capable of learning and performing in STEM fields—such as former Harvard University President Lawrence Summers—tend to rely on the core gender identity position to support their argument (Fogg, 2005; Jordan-Young, 2010).

The second strand of gender-focused research is the "gender socialization" approach. This approach tends toward post-positivism and constructivism; it is most closely aligned with Piagetian and cognitive constructivist theories of learning and it levels a challenge at the positivist, biologically deterministic assumptions of the "core gender identity" framework. Instead of viewing gender as built into every person in utero, the "gender socialization" approach conceives of the child as a *tabula rasa*: a blank slate across which gender is ascribed and through which gender is inscribed. Over time, socialization into gender normative behavior becomes so complete and absolute that certain forms of gender expression come to feel innate, even compulsory (Ehrensaft,

2011); and the work of those who subscribe to the "gender socialization" approach consists of helping people to think critically about how messages about gender norms are communicated and internalized, so that these messages and norms can be challenged and reshaped (Gauntlett, 2008; Gill, 2007; Peterson & Lach, 1990).

Educational efforts stemming from this approach tend to focus on two themes: challenging societal norms that lead to gender-based gaps in academic and vocational achievement, and using the differences in how girls and boys are socialized in order to create new pathways into school and work. For example, this approach challenges the assumption that girls and women are inherently less skilled at STEM disciplines, exploring instead the ways in which STEM discourses marginalize or exclude girls and women (Blickenstaff, 2005; Joyce & Farenga, 1999; Kelleher, Pausch, & Kiesler, 2007). Recent work has focused on integrating traditionally feminine practices into traditionally male-dominated domains; examples of this include using electronically enhanced fabrics and threads to introduce girls to engineering through sewing (Buechley, Peppler, Eisenberg, & Kafai, 2013) drawing on narrative and storytelling as means of introducing girls to computer programming, video game design, and digital technologies (Kelleher et al., 2007; K. A. Peppler & Kafai, 2007; Resnick et al., 2009); and offering a range of high-technology and low-or no-technology tools for inviting girls into activities across STEM domains (Hamner et al., 2008; Mayo, 2009; K. Peppler & Kafai, 2005).

Although both of these strands have contributed important insights into how gender emerges as a phenomenon of interest in learning environments, both are also misaligned to the queer and trans*theoretical frameworks that undergird this dissertation. With some exceptions, the "core gender identity" and "gender socialization" strands tend

to treat gender and gender identity as binaristic, innate, and fixed, whereas queer and trans* theory view these concepts as unfixed, performative, and emerging not as a binary but a spectrum of identity possibilities. Because of this, the review tends to draw primarily on research that falls into the third gender-focused strand: the "doing gender" approach. This strand adopts a cultural-historical and post-structuralist stance and challenges the previous strands—and particularly the "gender socialization" strand, its closest cousin—as overly monolithic and theoretically simplistic (Deutsch, 2007). This approach, which will be described in greater detail later in this chapter, aims to treat gender as dialectically achieved, through constant tension between individuals and the systems in which they are acting; between individuals and the resources they have at their disposal; between individuals and the rules and roles they are expected to follow (J. Butler, 2004; Green, 2007; Hancock & Tyler, 2007)

Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of media studies focused scholarship

In addition to the focus on gender, this dissertation takes a secondary interest in media studies and particularly in efforts to use multimodality and transmedia formats to disrupt gender and teach children to do the same. In reviewing prior work, then, I focused on interventions that emphasize critical reflection on media messages about gender as well as media creation as a tool for learning.

A good deal of important scholarship was omitted from this review because it diverged too much from these dominant themes of gender and transmedia. Future work in this area must draw on recent and powerful scholarship in trauma studies and theories of bearing critical witness in the classroom (e.g., Boler, 1997; Dutro, 2011; Felman, 1992; Yaeger, 2002). Gender is, in many ways that matter, a trauma visited upon bodies that

neither expect nor desire its dominion; and those researchers who choose to undertake efforts to intervene in gender are often called upon to bear witness to the pain of individual and collective histories of pain. Yet the relatively short duration of my study, along with my limited access to the non-school lives and experiences of the children participating in my study, meant that I could not build a strong claim about the traumas visited on my participants by cultural norms surrounding gender.

This review also omits work that positions gender at the intersection of multiple identity categories—particularly the categories of class, race, and ability. I believe, fiercely, in the importance of intersectionality as a tool for interrogating cultural norms, supporting effective learning and engaging in social transformation, but to the extent that this dissertation focuses on intersectional identities it does so by linking gender with sexual identities. Other identity categories are left for others to engage—it will be, I imagine, the work of my career to join in on these efforts.

Queer/Trans* Theory: A Brief Overview

> It is not a question of "*who* is queer," but "*how* is queer;" "not so much "*why* are they queer," but "why are *we* saying *they* are queer?"
>
> --Dilley (2010), p. 459

> "The field of transgender studies … concerns itself with what we—we who have a passionate stake in such things—are going to do, politically, about the injustices and violence that often attend the perception of gender nonnormativity and atypicality, whether in ourselves or in others."
>
> --Stryker (2006a), p. 6

Educational research, which Pinar (1998, pp., cited in Renn, 2010) has called "a highly conservative and often reactionary field" (p. 2), has been slow to take up the commitments and projects of queer theory. Renn (2010), reviewing queer work in higher

education, argues that integration of queer theoretical frameworks into educational research is crucial since "the insights to be gained from queered analyses of apparently nonqueer organizations have the potential to move discussions of persistent, intractable problems … to new solutions" (p. 137). I agree wholeheartedly with Renn's framing of the transformative potential of queer theory in education and embrace both the theoretical commitments and the commitments to social transformation that undergird the queer project in education.

Queer theory is an explicitly postmodern approach to theorizing identity, learning, knowledge, power relations, social structures, and the body. Queer is a sexual orientation, but it is also a philosophical position; queer is an identity category, and it is also a means of destabilizing the very notion of identity categories. Queer theory's primary phenomena of interest are the ways in which society and individuals frame anything as "normal"—as well as the accompanying marginalizing effect of normalization on what does not get counted as normal.

Queer theory straddles academic and activist categories. As a theory, it emerged from the union of literary analysis, feminist theory and sexuality studies; and it did so during the height of the pandemic known as AIDS, when non-heterosexual individuals were becoming suddenly, startlingly visible to mainstream society (Jagose, 1996a). Its interest is in interrogating the ways in which sexuality and gender inflect and are reflected in all forms of human activity—even (especially) those that are typically not considered explicitly sexual (Dilley, 1999; Jagose, 1996b; Sedgwick, 1990; Seidman, 1995). Queer theory takes an especial interest in identity, but it challenges the most common depiction of an individual's identity as singular and developing in a linear

fashion over time. Instead, queer theorists frame identity as "a constellation of multiple and unstable positions" (Jagose, 1996a, par. 3) and frame human activity as the practices of recognizing and choosing to take up—or to refuse—one or more available subject positions in a given context (Britzman, 1998; Green, 2007). In this way, queer theory aims to dismantle assumptions of a stable, knowable subject and replaces it with a framework that understands identity as multiple, shifting, and contingent on context.

Queer theory also aims at destabilizing normativity of all kinds—heteronormativity in particular. This framework positions alternative sexualities as more than just legitimate options; alternative sexualities are also positioned as direct challenges to the heteronormative, pro-capitalist and pro-reproductive beliefs that place straight, monogamous, home-owning and child-rearing sexuality at the top of the social order (Nagoshi, 2010; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Warner, 1993; Wilcox, 2006). Butler (1999), drawing on Foucault (1979), describes the "heterosexual matrix"—"that grid of intelligibility through which bodies, gender, and desires are naturalized" (p. 194.6). The heterosexual matrix is built around sex, sexuality, and gender and is, for Butler and other queer theorists, the primary tool of normalization of monogamous heterosexual desire and of marginalization of all other forms of sexuality. Queer theory is therefore interested in not simply interrogating the ways in which the heterosexual matrix shapes human experiences, but also in disrupting and dismantling the matrix itself.

A branch of queer theory, which labels itself transgender, or trans*, theory, has taken up, in particular, the gendered elements of the heterosexual matrix. Trans* theory extends the work of queer theory, expanding the critical lens to more explicitly encompass gender performances and identities in addition to sexualities (Nagoshi, 2010;

Stryker, 2004, 2006b). Just as queer theory aims to dismantle assumptions that there is, can, or should ever be a "normal," "stable," or "fixed" sexuality, trans* theory aims at dismantling assumptions that there can be a "normal," "stable," or "fixed" gender identity. Instead, trans* theorists argue that gender is highly variant—and that gender identity is the accretion of multiple gendered experiences across a variety of contexts. From the perspective of trans* theory, all individuals are gender variant, in the sense that they adopt differently gendered identity positions across contexts. Becoming a genderfluent individual, from this perspective, requires deepening one's awareness of the tools that are available in a given context for converting one's physical traits into gendered expression, and knowing how a local instantiation aligns with, challenges, or remixes broader societal norms about gender, gender identity, and gender expression.

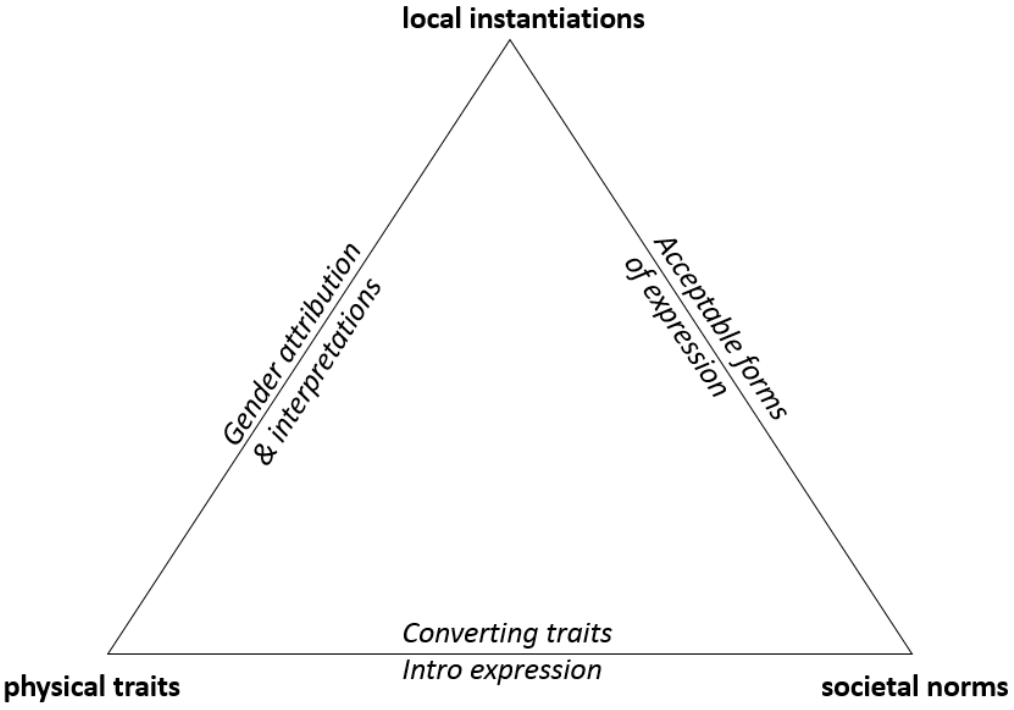
Trans* theorists typically focus on assumptions and norms that treat gender as a binary and frame those identities that do not fit into this binary (typically, transgender or gendervariant identities) as deviant. Whereas queer theory aims to dismantle heteronormativity, trans* theory focuses as well on cisnormativity—the belief that people's gender identities are, and should be, perfectly aligned with their assigned sex (King et al., 2013)—and cisgender privilege, which presumes that certain unearned rights and assets should be accorded to those who perform cisnormativity effectively (Johnson, 2013; E. Taylor, 2010).

A key assumption undergirding cisgender privilege is that a person's gender identity both is and should be immediately evident through external markers (Bornstein, 1994; Nordmarken, 2014). In everyday life, this assumption is generally unquestioned; in trans* theory, it is treated as a root factor in reproducing and reinforcing gender-based

hierarchies and access to or the withholding of power (Johnson, 2013; E. Taylor, 2010). The "rules" about gender—that there exist two, and only two, possible gender categories, and that those categories comes with dress codes, systems of personal and public expression, and viable and less viable academic and career paths—emerge as a system for determining who shall have the keys to the kingdom and who shall not pass.

From the perspective of trans*theory, gender can be viewed as a social construct that emerges through complex interactions between societal norms, local instantiations of those norms, and the physical traits that individuals convert into gendered expression in local contexts (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Representation of the trans* theoretical gender framework



The physical body consists of the site through which individuals experience the world; its hormones, its physiology, its shape and width and breadth. The traits that

constitute the physical body shift over time; these shifts create a body that is multiple in its experiences, a body whose meaning becomes layered over time. (Bornstein, 1994; J. Butler, 2004; Halberstam, 2005; Sycamore, 2010)

Individuals convert their physiological traits into expression in interaction with societal norms. Norms dictate, for example, what a person should do with facial hair: In a male-bodied individual, living in the United States, a beard is an appropriate marker of masculinity. For a female-bodied American, however, facial hair is viewed as inappropriate and a bearded woman is generally viewed as a transgression, a violation, a freak (Lipton, Sherr, Elford, Rustin, & Clayton, 2006). An individual experiencing the world through a biologically female body with facial hair, then, must make decisions such as whether to engage in the traditionally masculine practice of shaving their face in order to avoid appearing to violate social norms of feminine appearance.

Local instantiations, the third vertex of gender, both reflect and challenge societal norms and shape how individuals' decisions about gender performance will be interpreted. Gendered activity takes on meaning in local interactions; this meaning is developed through the rules, community structure, goals, and resources that drive the activities of local communities. The meaning of a bearded lady depends, for example, on whether they are encountered at the supermarket, at a drag show, on a fashion runway, or at an electrolysis center.

Gender is an interactional accomplishment. It emerges locally, as individuals engage in some meaningful task; this task may be overtly focused on gender, but it may as easily be focused—at least ostensibly—on something else entirely.

Gender is achieved through mediated discourse: Individuals act through the use of cultural tools, and through the use of those tools to achieve those goals in ways that express, reflect, or challenge gender norms (Butler, 1999; J. Butler, 2004; Dilley, 1999).

Justification for drawing on trans* theory

I have chosen to draw on the trans*theoretical framework in developing, designing, and analyzing my dissertation study for several reasons. First, as suggested above, this framework renders legible alternatively gendered experiences—the experiences of the gendernonconforming, the gendervariant, and the transgender, and it therefore offers important perspectives on gender that can and should be accounted for in social sciences in general as well as the field of educational research. Second, as will be discussed at greater length below, trans* theory aims at disrupting dominant assumptions about gender and gender identity—and, by extension, dominant ontological and epistemological commitments surrounding gender and learning. It is especially interested in issues of embodiment and resistance in learning, and it is therefore well poised to help push the learning sciences toward a deeper interrogation of these issues in educational research. Finally, queer/trans* theory is very much aligned to and in sympathy with emerging approaches to literacy and transmedia studies—two areas of particular interest to the instructional frameworks undergirding this dissertation.

Trans* theory and learning: Gender Fluency as a New Media Literacy Skill

Trans* theory has a particular interest in advancing individuals' fluency with the social construct of gender—what Bornstein (2013) labels "doing your gender mindfully." Increasingly mindful gender performance can be developed through increased facility with each of the three vectors of the trans*theoretical gender triangle: Social norms, local

instantiations, and physical traits. Trans* theory focuses on knowledgeable appropriation of gendering resources—tools and artifacts that enable individuals to perform gender in ways that engage critically with both societal norms and local instantiations of those norms, and that use the body as a site for engaging and resisting gender.

Although it does not explicitly use the term *historicity,* trans* theory takes an interest in the accretion of cultural values in social norms and the resources available for expressing gender. Here I am drawing on the traditions of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT, Engeström, 2009; V. Kaptelinin & B. Nardi, 2006; Leontyev, 1974; Roth & Lee, 2007; Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993) and similar sociocultural theories of learning that call for an emphasis on the ways in which newcomers to a community of practice slowly develop a sense of the history that contemporaneously valuable tools carry with them (Hutchins, 1995; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Of course, for the trans* theorist all of us are inductees into the gendered community of practice and all of us must develop a fluency with the tools, and their histories, that enable gender to be reproduced as a social construct and challenged as an unjust hierarchical system.

For trans* theorists, gender fluency is comprised of increasingly knowledgeable use of gendering resources, paired with an increased awareness of the ways in which gender is, and historically has been, positioned. It is a form of critical literacy, both written and read across bodies and contexts (Martino, 2009; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; S. L.-B. Young, 2009).

Trans* theory interrogates the role of media—and, in particular in the last two decades or so, the role of digital media—in framing cultural norms surrounding gender (Butler, 1997; Crimp, 1992; Gray, 2009). To date, however, very little work emerging out

of trans* theory has considered how children learn about gender and develop fluency in expressing gender and communicating gendered narratives using multiple media platforms (although many educational researchers working on issues of media literacy also integrate gendered concerns into their frameworks, even if this framework is not explicitly affiliated with trans* theory; e.g., Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Husbye, 2013; Wohlwend, 2012a). One of the important contributions this dissertation is poised to make is in framing gender fluency as a skill of new media. In the next section, I describe the overlap between queer/trans* theory and key principles of transmedia and new media literacies studies, discussing how the skills required to do one's gender mindfully align with these principles. I begin, however, with a brief overview of transmedia and new media literacy studies.

Transmedia & New Media Literacies Studies: A brief overview

Transmedia studies have been wrapped up with issues of learning, power, and social transformation since the beginning. The term "transmedia" originated with Kinder's 1991 book *Playing with power in movies, television, and video games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Kinder, 1991). Kinder's interest is in the "transmedia intertextuality among television, movies, and toys" (p. 40), and the author notes that this intertextuality calls for different processes of reading and navigating narrative.

"Even when young viewers do not recognize many of the specific allusions," Kinder writes, "they still gain an entrance into a system of reading narrative—that is, a means of structuring characters, genres, voices, and visual conventions into paradigms, as well as models for interpreting and generating new combinations" (p. 41). For Kinder,

and for many others who study transmedia narratives, this system of reading narrative is problematic because of its connections to capitalist, consumerist, and hierarchical structures of power (e.g., Apperley, 2007; Cova, Dalli, & Zwick, 2011; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Scolari, 2009b).

Transmedia narratives commonly aim to sell something, whether it be a Happy Meal, a video game, a movie ticket, or a worldview. And because transmedia narratives are persistent, pervasive, and often quite subtle, they are particularly effective at making their sales pitches. The subtlety and effectiveness of transmedia franchises in selling both products and worldviews gave rise to the field of critical media literacy (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Hobbs, 1998, 2004; Kellner & Share, 2007). This approach aimed primarily at helping learners to see the value systems that are baked in to media messages, and particularly to develop critical perspectives on the transmedia narratives that dominate American media consumption. For educators interested in working toward social transformation, this framework and the curricular approaches that have emerged from it (e.g., Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Buckingham, Banaji, Carr, Cranmer, & Willett, 2005; Kellner & Share, 2005; Livingstone, 2008; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Share, 2009) have been invaluable tools for helping learners develop a critical stance toward the culture in which they live.

Within the last two decades, scholars and educators of media have focused on extending the critical media literacy perspective to account for the new technologies that enable consumers to also create and circulate narratives of their own. Jenkins et al. (2009) describe what they label a “participatory culture”: One in which “not every member must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that what they

contribute will be appropriately valued." The authors argue that the emergence of an increasingly participatory culture has given prominence to a cluster of social skills and cultural competencies that they call the "new media literacies." These skills cluster around the practices of creative appropriation of media elements, circulation of media creations, and effective navigation of a broad range of virtual communities.

These new cluster of skills are important for academic, social, and workplace success (Ito et al., 2010; H. Jenkins et al., 2009); and they are also important for engaging with cultural messages about gender. It is not that gender norms have become more complex, but that people are faced with complex labyrinths of gendered messages, across media formats, across space, and across time. The ability to engage critically with these gendered messages—and, when desired, to create new narratives that challenge dominant discourse about gender—are important for supporting learners' ability to develop fluency with the role of gender in their culture and an ability to make reflective decisions about how to express gender and participate in gendered narratives and conversations.

There is, however, a third dimension to gender fluency: that of performance. Jenkins et al. (2009) cite performance as one of 12 new media literacies practices, defining it as "the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery" (p. 47). To the extent that this new media literacy practice is explored in education, it is usually applied to the act of trying on different (and sometimes differently gendered) identities across digitally mediated communities (Donnelly, 2008; Felt, Vartabedian, Literat, & Mehta, 2013; although for an exploration of learners' performance of alternative identities in physical, non-digital communities, see Halverson,

2010), and interventions focusing on this tend to emphasize the ethical concerns of performing different identities in this way (James, 2009).

From the trans* theoretical perspective, performance must be viewed in a slightly differently light—as the act of adopting differently gendered identity positions to reflect, and sometimes to challenge, dominant cultural norms and local instantiations of those norms. In other words, "performance" is not something one does when one joins a new internet community; it is something one does all the time, in all contexts where gender matters—which is to say in nearly all contexts.

An intervention that draws on trans*theoretical frameworks and emphasizes engagement with dominant norms about gender, then, must account for the performative aspects of gender. This dissertation does so, and it treats gender expression as a new media literacy skill—as a specific case of performance. The section below analyzing the gendered performance of the popular drag queen Sharon Needles demonstrates how and why gender expressoin must be viewed as a new media literacy.

New Media Literacies and Gender Fluency: A Case Study (Sharon Needles)

When gender is approached by scholars of new media, it is usually to address the ways in which gender norms are circulated by media franchises and the ways in which consumers of gender-based messages internalize, resist, and respond to these messages in their own media creations. Questions of transmedia messages about gender and educational strategies for helping learners "talk back" to problematic gender-based messages are important from this perspective and are tackled directly in the study driving this dissertation. However, this dissertation goes beyond the critical analysis of gendered messages and also treats *gender expression itself* as a transmedia issue in its own right.

Gender fluency—the cluster of skills that enable individuals to effectively navigate societal norms and local instantiations of those norms in order to enact their gender mindfully—may be viewed, at its core, as a literacy of new media. In many cases, the body is the media platform across which gender is both inscribed and read.

This is perhaps most evident in the most intentional and "over the top" performances of gender—those that fall under the umbrella of "gender-based drag." Gender-based drag—queening and kinging—has a long and rich history in LGBTQ communities. Defined broadly as a cross-gender performance designed to "send up" societal notions of femininity and masculinity (Newton, 1972; E. Shapiro, 2007), drag "describes discontinuities between gender and sex or appearance and reality but refuses to allow this discontinuity to represent dysfunction" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 236). Discontinuities are most commonly introduced by drag queens, male-identified people impersonating or performing as women, and drag kings, female-identified people who impersonate or perform as men. Less commonly, drag also includes faux queens or bio queens—female-identified people who perform an exaggerated or "camped-up" version of femininity; even less common is the existence of faux kings, or male-identified people who send up masculinity.

Because gender-based drag tends to draw on shared cultural references and requires a fluency with interpreting societal norms and expressing creative critiques of these norms to an audience (Butler, 1997), it can be thought of as not only a literacy of gender but also as a transmedia literacy. Many successful drag performers cite celebrities, queer heroes, queer history, and media depictions of queerness and gender; these citations are inscribed in dress, gesture, song choice, and verbal communications. For example, the

well known drag queen Sharon Needles draws on a shared knowledge of HIV/AIDS history in her choice of stage name: AIDS-related deaths in gay communities reached pandemic proportions in the late 20th Century (Mann, 1996; Mawar, Sahay, Pandit, & Mahajan, 2005); and decades of research has highlighted the particularly high rates of HIV transmission among intravenous drug users who share used needles (Bluthenthal et al., 2001; Darrow et al., 1987; Fisher & Fisher, 2000; Kral et al., 2001). As a contestant on the popular television show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Needles often took advantage of opportunities to offer sly commentary on social issues, as in her decision to dress as a "plastic surgery victim" (Figure 2):

Figure 2: Image of Sharon Needles (screenshot from the television show RuPaul's Drag Race)

A story about women, celebrity, and femininity is written across Needles' body in the image above. A viewer who is literate in narratives of body modification—and, in

particular, in the ways in which women are pressured to modify their bodies in order to maintain a youthful, Western European look—will notice the syringe in Needles' hand, the strip of white, bandage-like cloth across her nose, the design of her clothing to evoke a sense of emaciation. Her makeup—and especially the use of dark red lipstick rimmed in even darker lip liner—evokes popular images of the aging starlets of the last few decades, whose reliance on cosmetic surgery and heavy makeup to conceal their changing faces only emphasized their declining looks.

Needles' performance is a transmedia narrative that requires a sophisticated awareness of social norms and local instantiations of those norms. She appropriates and remixes culturally meaningful resources, using them in an overt performance of gender. The appropriative and performative nature of gender expression is not relegated only to drag performances, however; these are key aspects of all performances of gender. The color pink, associated in contemporary American culture with femininity, is appropriated regularly by individuals with a range of gender identities to inscribe a legible story of gender across their bodies. Pink has been adopted as the color of choice by the lingerie marketer Victoria's Secret, as well as by many college sororities. Victoria's secret has developed its "Pink Collegiate Collection" to capitalize on this synergy, and female-identified undergraduates who purchase and wear items from this collection are citing, consciously or not, a narrative of simultaneous sexualization and juvenalization of young women.

Clothing and color are only two sets of resources for expressing gender, however. Mannerisms, vocal cues, facial expressions, and language and diction are additional tools for gender expression. All of these come with long cultural narratives baked into them,

and performance of gender is therefore an expression, appropriation, and remix of a long transmedia cultural message.

Prior work and gaps in prior scholarship

A broad swath of scholarship in education and media studies has focused on identifying and challenging problematic cultural messages about gender, as well as on supporting learners in critiquing and reinscribing those messages.

As researchers aim at shifting discourses to support gender equity, educators are also working to equip learners with tools for critiquing and reinscribing problematic media messages about gender. Media literacy education has long focused on helping learners critique messages about social structures including gender in magazines, in children's books, on television and in film (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011; Hobbs, 1998, 2004; Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014; Kellner & Share, 2007); and increasingly, these efforts aim to help learners engage critically with transmedia franchises and transmedia messages. Media production is increasingly viewed as a crucial avenue for supporting learners in critique of media messages because it provides them with tools for challenging dominant messages about gender and circulating these messages through sometimes vast communities (Alper & Herr-Stephenson, 2013; Buckingham, 2003; H. Jenkins et al., 2009; Kress & Selander, 2012). What is missing from this perspective, however, is the position, set forth by queer and trans*theoretical theorists, that individuals are *always already* challenging dominant messages about gender, even as in other ways they are reinforcing those messages (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004b; Butler, 1988; Lazar, 2005).

The converse truth exists for queer and trans* theorists, who have covered very widely the arguments that gender is always at play, that beliefs about what counts as "normal" gender identity and geder expression undergoes constant maintenance and policing by individuals in a society, and that people develop intricate strategies for both aiming to measure up to the gender ideal and resisting that ideal (Butler, 1997; Green, 2007; Sycamore, 2010). However, queer and trans* theory are less engaged in questions about how people learn to perform gender in ways that reflect and/or resist dominant cultural beliefs, and even less engaged in questions about how to teach learners to consider more deeply how cultural messages influence them and how they might respond more reflectively and effectively. These are issues that are being explored with great energy and rigor among media literacy-focused researchers (Buechley et al., 2013; Husbye, 2013; Kafai & Peppler, 2011; Rheingold, 2008; Thoman & Jolls, 2005; Van Sluys, 2005; Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006; Wohlwend, 2012b), although not necessarily from the post-structuralist position of queer and trans* theory.

Some recent curricular approaches have begun to draw on poststructuralist narratives about identity and gender. Perhaps the most widely cited work in this area is Davies' (1989) work with feminist fairy tales to disrupt children's assumptions about gender roles and narrative; more recently, Blaise (2005) drew on poststructuralist theories of gender to explore how children reproduce gender norms in early elementary classrooms. Others have extended this work to incorporate narratives of transgendered identities and gendervariant experiences in K-12 classrooms (Bryan, 2012; Ryan et al., 2013). As Ryan, Petraw, and Bednar (2013) point out, these efforts are important to

support all learners in feeling free to express their own gender identities and to support and affirm the gender expressions of their friends and classmates.

To date however, empirical work exploring how to effectively teach about gender diversity with late elementary school students is limited to the few resources I identify above, and none of it frames gender expression itself as a transmedia literacy and as a crucial aspect of gender fluency. Instead, gender expression is treated as an issue outside of the scope of the curriculum, and classroom time is dedicated to critiques of dominant messages about gender. It is in this area that the study presented in this dissertation is poised to contribute to this important and underexplored area. By combining an emphasis on critical literacy of media messages with activities that invite students to perform gender and reflect on social norms governing gender expression, this dissertation aims to push empirical work on transmedia and gender literacy in this important and undertheorized area.

Queer/trans* theory and theories of learning: A synthesis / a bridge

As I have suggested throughout this chapter, there exists a gulf between queer/trans*theoretical perspectives and the perspectives adopted by scholars working in the field of educational research. This seems most likely to be a case of an artificial siloing: Queer theory into humanities or sociology departments, and learning theory into educational psychology or learning sciences programs. This dissertation rejects that artificial boundary, straddling it to pull from queer/trans* theoretical frameworks and the theories of learning and theories of method that most closely align with those frameworks. One of the significant contributions I hope to make with this dissertation is in developing a synergy between the commitments of like-minded theories and practices of scholarship

in each of these fields. In the section that follows, I describe how queer/trans* theory can align with sociocultural theories of learning and, in particular, with Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT, Engeström, 1987; A. N. Leont'ev, 1989).

Theory to theory: Queer/trans* theory and CHAT

Very little work to date has aimed at drawing connections between queer/trans theory and theories of cognition and learning. This is not due to any fundamental differences in theoretical or practical commitments, as many queer/trans* theorists and many scholars of learning and cognition take a deep interest in issues of cognitive development, the development of culturally valued or contested social practices, and the relationship between society and the individual. It appears, instead, to be largely due to the artificial boundary that is commonly drawn in academia between research in the social sciences and research drawing on the humanities-based traditions of literary analysis and cultural studies. This dissertation rejects that artificial boundary, straddling it to pull from queer/trans* theoretical frameworks and the theories of learning and theories of method that most closely align with those frameworks.

Queer/trans* theory and transmedia theory drove the rationale and many aspects of my study design. None of these theories, however, offers a robust theory of learning or methods appropriate for working with data collected in an educational setting. I have therefore selected Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as my primary theory of learning. CHAT is, as I discuss below, a theory that is very well (although not perfectly) aligned to the interests and ontological and epistemological commitments of queer/trans* theory; it also offers a framework to designing for learning in complex social contexts.

The theories of learning that most closely align with the commitments of queer/trans* theory are sociocultural. In particular, second-generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT, Engeström, 1987, 2009; A. N. Leont'ev, 1989; Roth & Lee, 2007; Wertsch et al., 1993) is strongly aligned with queer/trans* theory, because of its emphasis on a dialectical relationship between the mind and society (Vygotsky, 1978a; Wertsch, 1985), its focus on artifacts as imbued with the history and values of a society, and its treatment of human activity as the foundational unit of analysis. Both frameworks view activity as the foundational unit of analysis (Bornstein, 2013; Dilley, 1999; A. Leont'ev, 1989); both view the meaning of activity as situated both within culture and local context (Cole, 1996; Stryker, 2009); and both view mediation—the use of cultural tools to accomplish tasks—as a central feature of all object-oriented human activity (Bornstein, 1994; Danish, 2013; Halberstam, 2005). However, despite clear sympathies between the CHAT framework and queer/trans* approach to culture, learning, and identity development, no sustained effort has yet been undertaken in to bridge the disciplinary divide between these frameworks. A yawning void exists where queer, feminist, and trans* perspectives could be represented in, for example, the CHAT-sympathetic journal *Mind, Culture, and Activity*. MCA has apparently never published an article that adopts a queer theoretical perspective, and with a small handful of exceptions the only mentions of feminist theory are contained in book reviews. This trend is general across the CHAT field[1].

[1] One notable exception is John-Steiner's (1999) effort to demonstrate overlap between activity theory and feminist theory. In a lecture and then a book chapter, John-Steiner identified the feminist notions of interdependence, "self-in-relation," and co-construction of identity as well aligned to the theoretical and methodological concerns driving activity theory.

A similar trend is evident in queer and trans* theory, whose stated interest in identity development and the appropriation of cultural norms about sexuality and gender is not commonly supported by empirical work that sheds light on the mechanisms by which learners come to embrace and resist the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1999) through which human activities are interpreted.

Given that little effort to date has been made to integrate CHAT with queer/trans* theory, I devote the next several sections of this chapter to a discussion of some of the synergies and tensions between these frameworks.

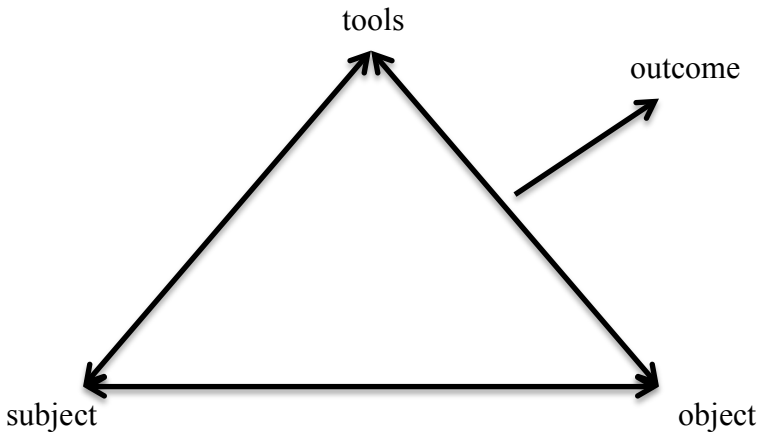
A brief history of CHAT

Activity Theory has its origins in cultural psychology (Cole & Hatano, 2010; V. Kaptelinin & B. A. Nardi, 2006). Drawing on the work of the Soviet learning theorist L.S. Vygotsky (Roth & Lee, 2007; Vygotsky, 1962) and A.A. Leont'ev (Leont'ev, 1978; A. Leont'ev, 1989), this approach holds that human thought can be best understood through an analysis of the activities in which humans engage and the goals, or objects they hope to attain; it proposes *activity* as the most basic unit of analysis (V. Kaptelinin & B. A. Nardi, 2006; A. Leont'ev, 1989; Tolman, 2001). All human activity, from the perspective of activity theory, is oriented toward achieving objects—these objects can be relatively concrete ("I want to avoid getting bitten by this dog that is attacking me") or more ideal ("I want to become a dog trainer with my own show on Animal Planet, with the fame and money that go along with that") (V. Kaptelinin & B. A. Nardi, 2006; Leont'ev, 1978). Regardless of the nature of the object of activity, efforts to attain the object can be understood as *mediated* through the use of tools (Miettinen, 2001; Wertsch et al., 1993). Tools should not be thought of as simple, value-neutral resources at hand for completing

a task. From the Activity Theory perspective, tools are imbued with shared cultural norms, beliefs, practices, and discourses—imbued, in short, with historicity (Engeström, 2004).

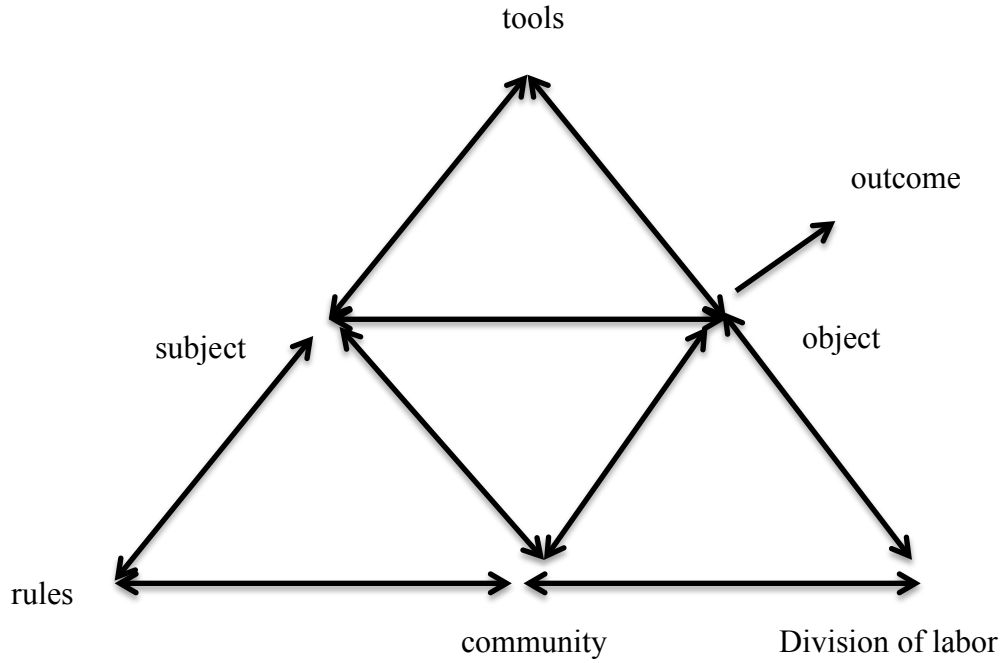
In order to effectively analyze activity, according to theorists from this tradition, we must understand how tools mediate individuals' actions toward an object (Vygotsky, 1978b). The relationship between subject, object, and tools can be represented as a dialectical one (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Representation of first generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (drawn from Engestrom, 1999, 2001)



This framework has been refined by subsequent theorists—most notably, Engeström (Engeström, 1999, 2001), who argued that the framework above fails to fully account for the ways in which community norms and negotiation of group dynamics further mediate the objects of activity and the ways in which activity is accomplished. Engeström, inspired by Leont'ev's (1981) proposal that individual activity be viewed as part of an *activity system,* offered what has been labeled "second generation" activity theory (Engeström, 1996; 2009; Figure 4).

Figure 4: Representation of second generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (drawn from Engestrom, 1999, 2001)



This more complex activity triangle illustrates the proposition that object-oriented activity is mediated not only by available tools for achieving an object but also by the features of the *community* within which the subject is acting. Division of labor, which Leont'ev theorized emerged as a result of tool development, meant that individual activities could be viewed as meaningful only within the context of the broader objects driving multiple types of activity (V. Kaptelinin & B. A. Nardi, 2006; A. Leont'ev, 1989). The extent to which an individual can act meaningfully within a system of activity is further mediated by the rules in operation within that system. A student in a science class, for example, may be working toward an object of completing the class successfully—"success" meaning, perhaps, earning a sufficiently high grade to advance to the next course in a progression. The simplest way for the student to earn a high grade would be to obtain a list of correct answers on class tests, and to use this list during test-taking.

However, a rule of most science classrooms is that using an answer list is considered cheating, so the student will more likely use a more labor-intensive and less effective route: Studying, taking notes, and participating in review sessions.

CHAT and gender enactments in activity

The second-generation activity triangle is appropriated here for elucidating how one particular cultural feature, gender, becomes enacted, performed, reinforced, and challenged through activity. Gender is rarely the overt object of activity within a system. However, from the queer/trans* perspective, gender can be seen as a structure that pervades all forms of activity, even when gender itself is not an explicit object. Gender, and individuals' socialization into gender norms, inflects both the perceived goals that may be undertaken by individuals and the objects that drive community activity. The tools that individuals and communities appropriate for achieving a given goal or object are determined to some extent by gender; and the division of labor by which a given object is achieved is always linked to gender. Gender is often a background frame that affords and constrains certain forms of activity, as when individuals engage real or perceived limits on the kinds of clothes they can wear, the forms of discourse in which they can engage, the kinds of labor that they feel are appropriate for them to engage in, the tools they feel they can pick up, and the ways they feel they can use those tools. In fact, as will be described in greater detail below, tools—and their role in mediating humans' forms of gender performance and expression—are central both to the CHAT perspective and to queer/trans* theory. I therefore provide a brief description of how these perspectives conceptualize tools, before moving on to justify a methodological

approach that enabled me to focus on the ways in which cultural tools mediated students' engagement with gender in the trans*literacies intervention.

Tools as gendering resources / gendering resources as tools

Tools are a central feature of human activity. They are, from the Activity Theoretical perspective, not simply the means by which individuals achieve their goals; they are also the site of transmission, appropriation, and disruption of culture (Cole, 1996; V. Kaptelinin & B. A. Nardi, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978b).

Human history is built into tools. Likewise, tools have a gendered history that makes them resources for expressing gender. It is not simply that a hammer can be used to insert a nail into a plank of wood, for example. There exist manners of using a hammer that can connote masculine or feminine approaches to carpentry (Figure 5). There exist color variations, variations in shape and size, subtle and overt ways in which hammers are marketed to women or men. A nail can be *slammed*; a nail can be *tapped*; a nail can be *swished* by a hammer into a plank of wood.

Figure 5: A recent trend of marketing pink and powder blue toolkits to women is exemplified in this Apollo kit, available from Amazon.com for $59.99.

The hammer, the nail, and the plank of wood: All are tools that mediate object-oriented activity. These tools are both, as Cole (1996) notes, material and ideal: That is, they exist both as items-in-use and as concepts imbued with historical meaning. The

history of the hammer, nail, and plank of wood is inextricable from the history of gender. When one picks up a hammer, one may or may not be aiming to engage in gendered activity; but one is doing so nonetheless. Certainly there may be moments during human activity when the gendered nature of hammering is not apparent, but that does not mean it is not present; a more likely explanation is that all members of a given activity system have adopted an identical stance toward appropriate use of the hammer in a given context.

The design, availability, and use of tools in the course of object-oriented activity can be used to express gender and to reinforce or challenge gender norms. Some of these tools have overt gender norms baked into them—think pink hammers, Barbie dolls, and men's aftershave—and some are less overtly gendered. In the research site at which my study took place, for example, a popular activity involved making necklaces and bracelets out of small, colored rubber bands. Although this activity was far more popular among female students than among males, many boys did get involved. The boys' rubber band jewelry, however, was differentiated from the girls' by color: Whereas the girls favored pastel colors for their jewelry, the boys used darker, more traditionally masculine colors—greens, blues, blacks, and yellows.

Theorizing contradictions

As noted elsewhere in this chapter, queer and trans* theory take an especial interest in the contradictions inherent in human activity. An emphasis on contradictions is also a key principle of CHAT. As Roth and Lee (2007) note, activity systems by their nature enact contradictions; these contradictions serve as the catalyst for individual and community-wide change. The authors also argue that contradictions are "historically accumulated"; that is, cultural artifacts and the activity systems within which they operate

develop contradictory purposes, motives, and uses over time. In human activity, contradictions emerge as moments of "trouble" that can lead to a shift in goals or a decision to abandon an activity altogether (S. A. Barab, Barnett, Yamagata-Lynch, Squire, & Keating, 2002). Contradictions fall into one or more of four categories, drawn from CHAT-focused work theorizing this concept (Roth & Lee, 2007):

Contradiction of use. A cultural artifact does not work for its intended use, as in when a mathematical equation does not solve the problem it is designed to solve or when a tool malfunctions or breaks.

Contradiction of purpose. An activity system may incorporate competing or contradictory objects, as in school systems that emphasize deep, personally meaningful learning alongside emphasis on achievement on standardized tests.

Intra-system contradictions. Activity within one system my work in contradiction with a more advanced form of the same activity, as when students in a science class memorize terms but do not engage in the deeper problem-solving approaches of working scientists.

Inter-system contradictions. At times, activity or purpose in one system may contradict activity or purpose in a different system. A teacher may, for example, teach about systemic racism with students but engagement with racist social structures may not be valued in the teacher's social community outside of school.

From the CHAT perspective, contradictions are relevant insofar as they serve as mediators of activity--contradictions become evident to actors, who shift their activity in response (Engeström, 1999; Roth & Lee, 2007). Contradictions—and actors' response to contradictions—therefore serve as a central force driving learning. They play a somewhat

less central role in queer/trans* theory: Contradictions are viewed as everpresent, but reconciliation of contradictions is viewed as unnecessary and perhaps even impossible (Britzman, 1998; K. K. Kumashiro, 2002). This dissertation incorporate these somewhat different but complementary perspectives on contradiction in the design of the study, highlighting both in the enactment of activity and in the analysis moments of contradiction as rich sites for engagement.

Queer/trans* theory is particularly interested in how individuals can enact contradictions without resolution, and this dissertation draws on CHAT because the activity theoretical framework makes it possible to both highlight and interrogate contradictions as they emerge in human activity. Throughout this dissertation, I draw on contradictions to highlight both to students and to readers of this work the ways in which social norms surrounding gender pervade everyday life even when we believe we are not influenced by those norms. These contradictions were used to enable students to account for their behaviors and beliefs, and to help them to consider how their actions shift across contexts and time.

Bringing it all together: A rationale for the trans*literacies intervention

As I hope has become clear throughout this chapter, queer and trans* theoretical frameworks offer an important lens for considering the role that gender plays in the social, emotional, and academic lives of all people. It's a lens that has not yet been consistently employed by scholars of gender working in schools of education. Likewise, educational research—and particularly research that foregrounds sociocultural theories of learning—has much to offer scholars working from within the queer/trans*theoretical tradition. The

most obvious contribution is in developing a fuller, more complete theory of the role of sexuality, gender, and desire in learning. To date, theories of learning and educational interventions that attempt to account for these things tend to do so only when they play an explicit role—for example, when bullying based on real or perceived sexual orientation is in evidence, or when interventions focus on issues of sexual or gender diversity (e.g., Alexander & Cagle, 2004; Curran, 2006). Queer and trans* theory take the position that sexuality and gender are nearly always at play in any interaction, and that any theory of learning or teaching must account for the ways in which these aspects of human experience mediate the process of learning and knowing (Britzman, 1998; Britzman & Gilbert, 2004).

This dissertation aims to integrate the concerns of queer/trans* theory with the concerns of sociocultural theories of learning, along with the concerns of media literacy-focused work. To date, neither queer studies nor educational research has produced a consistent and coherent strategy for carrying queer/trans*theory through the design, implementation, and analysis of a gender-focused educational intervention. I have adopted this as a key goal of my program of research, beginning with the dissertation you are reading today.

This dissertation takes a first pass at demonstrating how queer and trans* theory can be used to inform the design, implementation, and analysis of an educational intervention, implemented in a formal classroom setting. The intervention at the core of this study focuses on recruiting new media literacy skills for the purpose of engaging, critiquing, and challenging dominant narratives of gender. The goal of this intervention was to support learners in developing theories of gender that accounted for the diversity

of gender identities, expressions, and experiences that all of us accrete over time, simply by living in and moving through the world. A great deal of prior work has aimed at supporting learners in developing a critical stance on gendered messages, of course; this dissertation adds another wrinkle: emphasizing performance in addition to the critical and creative forms of engagement that are commonly emphasized in media-focused interventions. This dissertation—poised as it is at the intersection of learning sciences, gender studies, and transmedia studies—aims to contribute to the commitments and concerns of all three fields.

Chapter Three

Methodological Framework and Study Design

In this chapter, I detail the research site, data collection procedures, and measures of learning used in the trans*literacies intervention, presenting a rationale for the design, implementation, and analysis of the study. In approaching my study from the framework of CHAT, I drew on the principles and theoretical commitments of Mediated Discourse Analysis (Jones & Norris, 2005b; Scollon, 2001b; Wohlwend, 2013) and nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2007, 2013) in situating my research site and in designing the intervention at the core of my study. To analyze data collected during the study, I drew on multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & Selander, 2012; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Lemke, 2009; Norris, 2004; Theodoor Van Leeuwen, 2005) in order to interpret and present findings about student learning.

The rest of this chapter proceeds as follows: First, I provide a rationale for my chosen methodological approaches. Next, I situate my research site. In order to do this, I provide the "administrative" details that can help bring the site into focus, but I also offer my initial observations about the role of gender and transmedia in my research site. From the perspective of MDA and nexus analysis, it is essential to situate the research site in this way before designing an intervention that is intended to transform the practices and routines of the site (Scollon, 2001b). Third, I describe my study design. Following Sandoval's (2014) call for developing embodied conjectures in educational research, I describe the relationship between my theoretical framework and the specific features of the trans*literacies intervention. Finally, I provide the materials used in the trans*literacies curriculum.

From theory to method: MDA, nexus analysis, multimodal discourse analysis

The power of cultural tools to frame human activity and, therefore, human cognition, is a central focus of this dissertation. Gender has been framed throughout this dissertation so far as an achievement that is accomplished through the use of gendering resources—cultural artifacts into which a gendered history is inscribed—and cultural consensus about "gender appropriate" behavior is constructed through these tools and the messages through which these tools are communicated. Media artifacts and platforms are also viewed as an essential teaching tool that can mediate children's engagement with and critique of gender norms.

Since mediation is so crucial to this dissertation, I selected methods that could enable me to make mediation central to the design and analysis of my study. As I have discussed elsewhere, the trans*theoretical framework holds that gender is an interactional accomplishment that is achieved through the interactions of individuals with local instantiations of gendered norms; these interactions account for (reflect, reproduce, and reinscribe) broader social norms about gender. I developed, through my review of relevant literature, through prior research focusing on gender, and through my experience as a queer- and trans-bodied human, a growing working knowledge of social norms but needed a method for establishing how gendered norms were instantiated in my specific research site. To do this, I drew on nexus analysis and Mediated Discourse Analysis—two related modes of inquiry that focus on identifying the common activities and routines that constitute a research site.

Mediated Discourse Analysis aims at extending the frameworks of Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2013; Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001) to better understand human actions as mediated by tools. Scollon (2001b) notes that the MDA

perspective "sees discursive practice as *one form of social practice*, not the foundational or constitutive form of practice out of which the rest of society and the resulting power relations arise…. MDA takes it that discourse is *among the means* by which society and culture are constituted" (pg. 141, italics in original). It is therefore essential from this perspective to focus on not only discourse but also mediated actions—defined by Scollon as any "social action taken with or through a mediational means" (Scollon, 2001b, p. 146)

From the MDA perspective, all mediated activity is located at "a nexus of social practices, social identities and social goals" (Jones & Norris, 2005a, p. 9). Scollon (2002) refers to this as the *nexus of practice*—the clusters of actions that are recognized as meaningful and commonplace by members of the community, and that are linked to culturally valued ways of being and acting in the world. Establishing the nexus of practice at a research site helps the researcher to identify both the kinds of people who make up a community and the genres of activity that characterize normal practices within that community (Scollon, 2001a). Once the nexus of practice has been established, it becomes possible to introduce "transformative events" (Wohlwend, 2009) that can shift the establish routines.

This dissertation is inspired by the principles of MDA, beause of its commitments to identifying and working to transform mediated routines that are often largely taken for granted and uninterrogated by participants in a given social context. However, because this dissertation also privileges multimodal activity and takes multimodality as a key feature of trans*literate practice, analysis was driven by the framework of multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA, Kress, 2009; Kress & Selander, 2012; Norris, 2004). The

MMDA framework was used to identify forms of mediated activity and gendered and transmedia routines that constituted the everyday, common, taken-for-granted practice of my research site.

Although I began my study with some general ideas about the key features that I wanted to implement during the unit, these ideas shifted in the weeks preceding the start of the trans*literacies unit as I became a participant-observer in my research site. As I developed a sense of the gendered and transmedia-focused practices and routines that were constructed as natural, common, and unremarkable by members of the classroom community, I developed a stronger sense of the kinds of activities that might serve as transformative events for the students in my study.

Given this, I offer a sonatina in the section below, in which I detail some of the gendered and transmedia practices at my research site. This must precede the description of my intervention, because it informed the design and implementation of the trans*literacies unit in ways that will be detailed later.

Research site and data collection procedures

Situating the research site

Overview of "The Social Justice Academy"

The "gender diversity unit" that is at the core of this dissertation was implemented in the Social Justice Academy's mixed-grade 4/5 classroom, which consisted of 53 students (34 male-assigned children and 19 female-assigned children), 2 teachers ("Elly" and "Rick), and 3 teaching assistants. The unit was implemented over approximately ten weeks during the middle third of the academic year, beginning in early November and continuing through mid-February.

The Social Justice Academy is a charter school located in a medium-sized city in southeastern Indiana. The school was opened in 2009 and maintains an enrollment of approximately 200 students from grades K-8. Curricula and pedagogical approaches are designed to explicitly address issues of social justice, in line with the school's stated vision:

> The vision of [the Social Justice Academy] is to eliminate the predictive value of race, class, gender and special capacities on student success in our school and in our communities by working together with families and community to ensure each child's success…. [the Social Justice Academy] believes in:
>
> Ending the predictive value of race, class, language, gender, and special capacities on student success in our schools and communities by working with families and communities to ensure each child's success.
>
> Empowering students to be contributing participants in their education, their community, and the diverse society in which we live. The keystones to change rely upon the creation of a learning community that provides students with experiences that are immediately relevant.

At SJA, teachers and students were empowered to identify and process experiences of sexism, and female-assigned students in particular were ready and willing to point out sexist attitudes whether they were exhibited by peers, teachers, or society. Everywhere in the school, for example, I heard teachers eschewing the traditional "boys and girls" attention-getting phrase, in favor of referring to students as "friends": "Friends, I need you to turn in your notebooks." "I see one friend who's not paying attention." "Several friends helped organize the classroom today." I heard about units in classrooms across the school that aimed at helping students critique sexist media messages and reflect on sexist practices in the local community and within the school's walls.

The school's commitment to explicitly addressing unjust social structures is operationalized in schoolwide curricular themes that take up issues of social justice and activism and in teachers' and administrators' commitment to supporting students in developing strategies for addressing inequity. Each year a social justice-oriented theme is chosen as the school's throughline. This throughline is emphasized across the curriculum, but particularly in the school's P-3 (place-, problem-, and project-based) curriculum. This curriculum is based on the Teaching For Understanding framework (Wiske, 1998) that emphasizes four "core dimensions": generative topics, understanding goals, performance of understanding, and ongoing assessment (Perkins & Blythe, 1994). In the 2013-2014 school year, the year during which this study was conducted, the school's throughline was "origins." The "origins" theme was anchored in three driving questions (Figure 6).

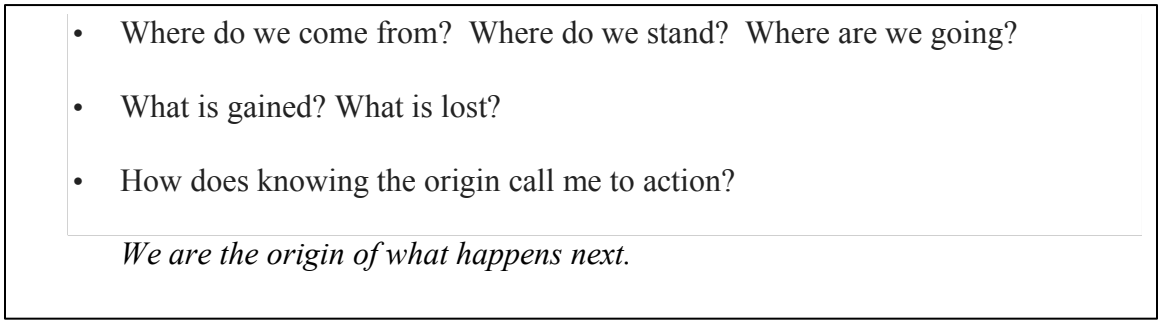


Figure 6: Driving questions for the "Origins" throughline at the "Social Justice Academy."

All classrooms had the "Origins" throughline questions posted on and visible on a wall, and teachers took up the throughline in a variety of ways. For example, early elementary teachers at the school developed a media literacy unit that enabled students to critique media messages about a variety of issues, including gender, and to consider how critical analysis enables the viewer to make more reflective decisions about how to respond to

television and print advertisements. In the 4/5 classroom, the "origins" questions drove a range of thematic units on such diverse topics as climate change, Indiana state politics, and fantasy writing.

The 4/5 classroom at SJA was selected as the study site for several reasons. First, preadolescence was identified as an important and understudied age at which to engage with sophisticated ideas about gender. One reason this age range is important is that most pre-adolescent children have not yet developed a full sense of their sexual and gender orientations and identities, although it is common for children of this age to be focusing more on gender and sexuality as important aspects of individuals' lives (Goodman, 2013). Because their identities have not yet developed in these areas, most preadolescents enact compulsory heterosexual and cisgender identities, often without being provided an opportunity to reflect on or challenge these identity positions (Johnson, 2013; Morris-Roberts, 2004; Stephens & Few, 2007).

The site was also chosen because of an ongoing relationship with the lead teacher in this classroom. "Elly," a female-identified teacher, was in her second year at SJA. In the previous year, she was a teaching aide in the 4/5 classroom and was involved in developing curricula focusing on issues of social justice and gender. In that year, I supported Elly and the classroom's teachers as they developed and implemented a unit for No Name Calling Week, a nationwide project developed by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educators' Network that aims at tackling bullying and supporting empathy development among students. In addition to activities focusing on empathy and setting boundaries with friends and peers, Elly's unit addressed gender diversity and sexual orientation. Students were introduced to the idea that gender is a spectrum, not a binary,

and considered how a binaristic approach to gender might be one reason why children are bullied in schools. The following year, when Elly was promoted to a teacher role in the classroom, she invited me to work with her continue to explore the issues we had begun to uncover in the No Name Calling Week unit implemented in the previous year.

Elly's commitment to LGBTQ issues extended beyond the classroom. She volunteered with a local outreach effort targeting LGBTQ youth and worked with her community's LGBTQ Pride steering committee. During the year or so that we worked together, we discussed queer/trans* theory; issues of race, class, disability, and other identities that intersect with gender and sexual identities; and political issues, current events, and children's and young adult books that addressed these issues. Together, we read Kate Bornstein's *My new gender workbook* (2013) and Julia Serano's *Whipping girl* (2009), two books that are foundational to trans* theory and that are foundational to my application of trans*theory in this dissertation. Elly also pointed me to the manga series *Wandering Son* (Shimura, 2011), S. Bear Bergman's children's books addressing gender identity, and several other books that address issues of sexual and gender diversity with care and sensitivity. Elly was known by students as the "gender" teacher. When they had questions about gender or wanted to talk about sexism or LGBTQ issues, students always came to Elly.

In the 2013-2014 academic year, when my study took place, Elly was co-teaching with Rick, a male-identified teacher with several decades of teaching experience but who was in his first year teaching at SJA. Rick expressed enthusiasm about the work Elly and I co-designed, and he participated enthusiastically in planning and debrief sessions. He explained to me during and after the trans*literacies unit that he intentionally took a

supporting role in implementing the unit, in order to serve as an "ally" (his term) and to provide space for Elly and me to enact our desired activities and classroom conversations. He devoted a good deal of energy to reflecting on his position as a white, male-identified teacher and very often spoke of his desire to avoid enacting what he himself identified as "white male privilege" in the classroom and in debrief sessions.

Data collection procedures

In line with the principles of MDA and nexus analysis, my approach to data collection began with developing strategies to establish the media- and gender-related practices—the countable, discrete and interconnected actions that cohered in various phases of the school day—that made up classroom routines and that were recognized as meaningful and commonplace by members of the classroom community. I chose to identify and attend to phases of the day that were perceived by participants as foundational and stable (i.e., consistent and relatively fixed in terms of duration, organization, and structure) elements of the school day, with the goal of developing a sense of patterns of behaviors—or, in MDA terms, common, repeated, and routine mediated activity. I asked the teachers to help me identify stable, consistent routines to observe in order to develop a stronger sense of the commonplace practices of this classroom; on their advice, I chose to observe "Morning Meeting," a daily whole-class gathering designed to establish the day's schedule, address students' or teachers' issues or concerns, and support community-building; lunch, during which many students would stay in the classroom to complete work or chat with the teachers; and lunch recess, a time when students were more lightly supervised and could engage in building friendship groups, engaging in informal and school-sanctioned play activities, and organizing

playground games. (The most popular of these games were Capture the Flag and Scratch, probably best described as a more cooperative and slightly less aggressive variation of dodge ball.) During the harshest winter weather, recess was convened indoors, and I watched students play with hand puppets, cluster around board games, draw pictures, and design games of their own.

Later, once the trans*literacies unit began, I shifted my data collection approach slightly to prepare me to conduct a multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA). A key principle of MMDA is that it "permits the incorporation of all identifiable communicative modes, embodied and disembodied, that social actors orchestrate in face-to-face interactions" (Norris, 2004, p. 101). Multimodal discourse analysis is similar in many ways to mediated discourse analysis, in that it privileges mediated actions—of which discourse is only one kind (Scollon & Levine, 2004). However, multimodal discourse analysis takes an especial interest in how communicative acts emerge and can be interpreted across multiple modalities (Kress & Selander, 2012; Theo Van Leeuwen, 2004). During the trans*literacies unit, I drew on MMDA as a tool for interpreting students' communications about gender across multiple modes and found it particularly useful in triangulating students' messages about gender across modes and across time.

Data collection equipment

I recorded activity during Morning Meeting with one to two video cameras and took field notes during observations as well. I also took photographs of students when their activity during Morning Meeting seemed pertinent to gender or transmedia. During outdoor recess, I only collected field notes, for practical reasons: the recess area stretched across a 3.5-acre park and I had to move quickly to keep up with student activities, and it

would have been difficult to carry a camera and to collect viewable footage. During lunch and indoor recess, however, I regularly collected data with at least one and, when possible, two cameras, an audiorecorder, and a still camera. I also took field notes during these times.

Initially, I had only the vaguest sense of what activities might be "pertinent to gender or transmedia," and my only sense of the taken-as-normal routines of this classroom came from my informal observations in the previous year and from conversations with Elly and Rick. I therefore began by attempting to capture as much activity as possible on video, in audio, in photos, and in my field notes. I also regularly presented my observations to Elly and Rick and elicited their help in identifying and interpreting patterns in classroom activity. Crucially, I also tried to participate in classroom activities as much as seemed reasonable (i.e., as much as would be appropriate and unremarkable for a non-teaching adult in this classroom). In this way, I aimed for triangulation among a range of data types and sources (Scollon, 2001b; Scollon & Scollon, 2007; Wodak, 2001) in order to draw defensible conclusions about the sorts of routines that constituted my research site.

These procedures continued into the intervention itself, although I added additional data collection tools and used them with increased regularity during the ten weeks of the trans*literacies unit. Because my interest was in mediated action, it was necessary but insufficient to record student talk; I needed also to record non-talk activity in the classroom. This required me to use two video cameras instead of one, and to be strategic about the placement and use of these cameras. I always stationed one camera in a corner of the room, at an angle to record the broad patterns of activity that constituted

the school day; and I carried one camera around the classroom with me to capture close ups of student activity. Decisions about which mediated actions to capture were dictated in part by student and parental consent—I avoided capturing any student on video who had not assented or whose parents had not consented to participate in my study. In addition, I negotiated an interest in breadth with an interest in depth. Although one of my goals was to collect a record of mediated action from as wide a range of students as possible during any given activity, I also wanted to follow more richly a smaller number of students, in order to develop a deeper qualitative understanding of how gender and transmedia-focused practices shifted for individuals across the unit.

Choosing students for case studies

In the weeks leading up to and during the first weeks of the trans*literacies intervention, I focused on selecting students to follow as possible case studies. I used the following criteria to identify case study students:

- **Consent/assent procured.** For obvious ethical reasons, I could only choose to follow students who had submitted signed consent and assent forms.
- **Typicality.** I wanted to focus on at least one student whose initial approach to theorizing gender seemed representative of general classroom and broader social attitudes toward this issue. Using students' pre-assessment responses and their initial activity in the first few days of the trans*literacies unit, I identified four students whose written and spoken attitudes toward gender suggested that 1) they had yet not developed a consistent critical perspective on gender and gender norms; 2) they were aware of and could articulate some issues related to gender; 3) they articulated questions or confusion about one

or more issues related to gender; and 4) they exhibited some degree of engagement with transmedia narratives. Of the four students I chose to follow, two—Joshua, a male-assigned fifth grader, and Emily, a female-assigned fifth grader—play the most prominent role in the findings chapters that follow. Joshua, a fan of manga and anime who consistently integrated his passions into classroom activity, began the unit articulating some confusion about gender, gender identity, and sexism, along with a deep interest in engaging with the curriculum. Emily, who articulated an interest in online children's games such as Animal Jam, emphasized early in the unit that she did not particularly care about gender and that she thought people made too much of issues such as gender differences in clothing choices. However, she was a consistent participant in whole class and small-group discussions about gender, and proposed thoughtful, if sometimes inconsistent, arguments about the role of gender and sexism in contemporary society. The majority of students in this class could be clustered around Joshua and Emily—they knew a little bit about gender and sexism, having studied it to some extent during their time at SJA, but they either did not feel knowledgeable about gender or did not feel particularly passionate about the issue.

- **Atypicality.** I wanted to identify at least two exceptional cases: Students whose approach to the unit varied in some way from the predominant attitudes toward gender evinced in the classroom. I wanted to focus on at least one student whose approach to gender diversity seemed more sophisticated and one student whose approach to gender diversity seemed less sophisticated than

was typical for students in this class. I chose to focus primarily on Andrew, a male-assigned fifth grader whose approach to gender seemed deeply rooted in what I will describe later in this dissertation as a "normals" approach. Andrew's spoken attitudes toward gender, gender identity, and sexism seemed outdated in many ways: For example, he expressed a belief that most women do not work outside of the home—a belief that is not rooted in fact—and made several statements suggesting that he saw boys as superior to girls. I focused on Andrew as a particularly intransigent case, a student whose views on gender shifted only very slightly and who ended the intervention still fully embracing the "normals" approach. Conversely, three students—Chris, Kay, and Laura—exhibited a more nuanced view of gender than was typical in this classroom. These three students engaged in the critical, creative, and performative aspects of the curriculum in ways that made visible a sophisticated and reflective approach to exploring gender. I draw on their participation in classroom activities and their artifacts throughout the unit to demonstrate the kinds of engagement that is possible among children in my target age group.

In addition to video, audio, and photographic data collection, I also collected copies of student-generated work throughout the unit. This work included multimedia representations, written responses on worksheets, and written reflections in students' notebooks. These artifacts were used to develop a stronger sense not only of how student

thinking was shifting across the unit but also to develop a sense of the sorts of ways in which students represented their knowledge.

Pre- and post-assessment tool

Finally, I administered a written pre- and post-assessment just before and immediately following the trans*literacies intervention. This assessment drew from Bornstein's (2013) gender aptitude checklist, designed to help people develop a stronger sense of their general perception of gender, gender identity, and gender norms. This checklist was chosen because it specifically emphasizes gender as a spectrum of identity possibilities and gender norms as malleable and changeable; and many of the questions are intended to help respondents see the extent to which they have embraced binaristic assumptions about gender. The checklist, however, is prohibitively long and designed for adults—many of its questions focus on sex, genitals, and experiences that children may not yet have had an opportunity to have. I therefore culled, with the help of Elly and the school's director and curriculum director, a smaller number of questions that would be age-appropriate and non-invasive. Because I was interested in developing a stronger sense of how students viewed all three vectors of gender—physical traits, social norms, and local instantiations—I crafted at least two questions that would target each of these vectors (Table 1).

Table 1: alignment of pre- and post- assessment questions to the three vectors of the trans*theoretical gender framework

category	***Question***
Social norms	1. What does the term gender mean to you? Please explain.
	2. How do you think people your age figure out whether someone is a boy or a girl?
	3. Do you think there are differences in how boys and girls

	think? Why or why not? What examples can you give?
Physical traits	4. Do you think boys and girls are equal?
	5. What privileges do boys have that girls don't have? What privileges do girls have that boys don't have?
Local instantiations	6. Do you think parents and teachers treat boys and girls equally? Why or why not?
	7. Do most boys and girls have to follow the same rules at home or not? Are chores the same?
	8. Are there any unwritten "rules" for boys and girls?

Routines in the 4/5 Classroom

In line with Scollon's (2001b) call to establish the forms of mediated action that constitute the nexus of practice, I clustered the patterns of activity into a set of larger practices. There were many other practices, many other mediated actions, that made up the nexus of practice, certainly; but I focused my attention on those that were most directly related to gender and media, and to the goals of the trans*literacies interventions. I named these practices bringing-in-from-home, equity-driven collaboration, and performing alternative identities.

Bringing-in-from-home

It was routine, common, and normal for students to introduce non-school topics, activities, and passions in school. The officially sanctioned times for this included the morning meeting, which included a "share" component during which students took turns presenting some topic or experience to the rest of the class; and informal lunch meetings, when smaller groups of students met with one or both of the teachers to accomplish some task (such as writing the class's blog or helping to plan for a future class project). During this time, students could introduce a topic of interest and expect the focused attention of students and teachers. For example, in the weeks leading up to the trans*literacies

intervention I observed members of the class's blogging group as they brought in sexist advertisements or directed Elly and their classmates to websites whose gender politics they found particularly powerful or problematic. During the "share" portion of Morning Meeting, several students discussed recent Minecraft projects or movies they had recently watched. These topics were treated as normal and routine by the teachers and students, and were taken with the same level of seriousness with which the class responded to, for example, a student's story of getting into a mild car accident with a parent or a student's description of a new pet.

The practice of bringing-in-from-home extended beyond the sanctioned phases of the school day, however. For example, I quickly learned of a general passion for the British television series Doctor Who. Students brought in books about the show and shared them with classmates; students told Doctor Who jokes. ("Knock knock." "Who's there?" "Doctor." "Doctor Who?") Students wore Doctor Who-themed t-shirts ("I <3 <3 Gallifrey"); students re-enacted scenes from recent episodes, with many students interested in playing a Dalek—the show's most perniciously and deliciously evil villain. Student notebooks were commonly filled with sketches from the show, and students like Rory (Figure 8) spent a significant amount of time drawing the T.A.R.D.I.S. and characters from the show.

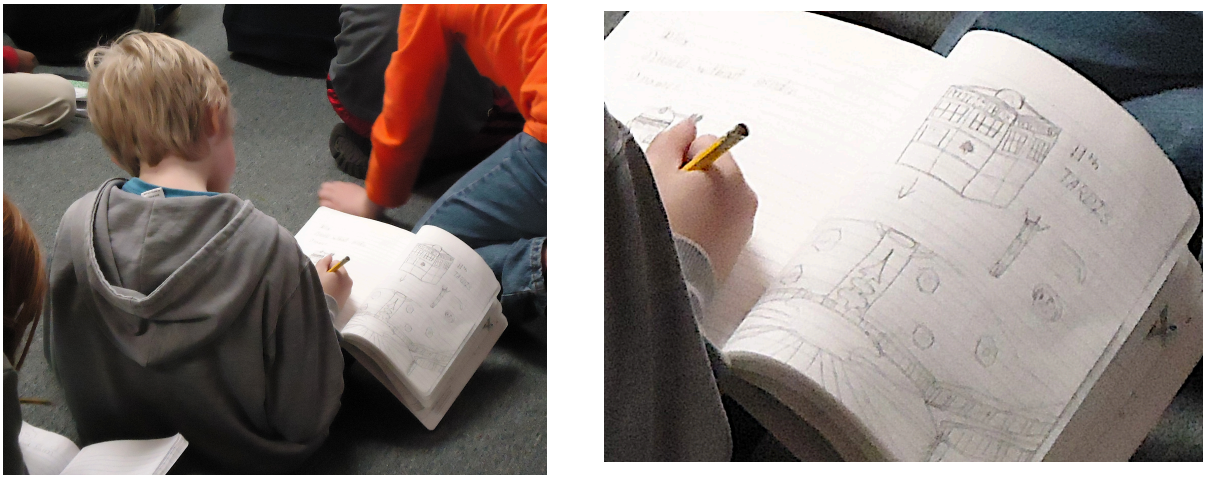


Figure 8: Rory's notebook was filled with drawings from Doctor Who. This page includes an exterior view (top right) and an interior view (bottom right) of the TARDIS. Many students' notebooks were similarly filled with drawings of Doctor Who or other television, film, or literary characters.

One student brought to school a Doctor Who-themed Pinewood Derby car (Figure 7), which he held in his cupped palms during the "share" portion of Morning Meeting. He explained that he had built the car with his father and added, with pride, that it had won an award for creativity.

Figure 7: Andrew's Pinewood Derby car, fashioned after the TARDIS.

Although Doctor Who was a prominent example of the bringing-in-from-home practice, several other examples were also evident. During the time of my study, the song "The Fox (What Does the Fox Say)," performed by the Norwegian comedy duo Ylvis, was extremely popular, and many students regularly burst into their own rendition of the song—during class transitions, before or after school, and sometimes during lessons or formal classroom activities. At lunch, students or one of the teachers often played the song on a laptop, and it can be heard in the background of many video

and audio recordings. Once, during a math lesson on long division, Elly prompted a student to repeat a question she hadn't heard by asking, "What did you say?"

The response, from another student in the classroom: "Ring-ding-ding-ding-dingeringeding! Gering-ding-ding-ding-dingeringeding!"

This is part of the chorus of "The Fox (What Does the Fox Say)," and it was delivered in tune. Elly turned to the student and asked him, in a tone that was a mix of laughter and exasperation, to hush. He did, but as math was ending and students were lining up for lunch, several took up the song, asking what the fox says on their way out the door.

Other topics of interest during the time of my study included Suzanne Collins' popular *Hunger Games* trilogy (S. Collins, 2008, 2009, 2010) the book and film adaptations of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (Rowling, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007), and the AMC television series *The Walking Dead*—a small group of students regularly played an elaborate game of zombie-hunter (the rules of which were never fully clear to me) during recess.

The actions that constituted bringing-in-from-home—sharing, doodling, indexing collectively appreciated cultural references, performing, and play-acting—were treated as wholly normal, common, and unremarkable instances of students engaging their passions in the classroom. This is to say that it was common, it was normal, it was appropriate for students' passions for various transmedia franchises to thread through official classroom activity. Transmedia's role was to support students in building their identities as passionate, creative individuals whose lives outside of school were rich with narrative. Transmedia was not, however, commonly used as an explicit instructional tool: Although

it commonly bled into official school activities, it was not adopted in the official script of the classroom.

Since bringing-in-from-home tended to focus on transmedia franchises and narratives, and since it was positioned as a sort of "sanctioned unsanctioned" form of student activity, I hypothesized that it would be productive—and not too difficult—to convert transmedia narratives and platforms into a tool for learning. I further hypothesized that the passions that were evident in how students engaged with the television shows, books, and music they loved meant that integrating these narratives into the trans*literacies unit could create opportunities for students to engage with gender in a way that felt both interesting and relevant to their everyday, lived experiences. It seemed that it would not be much of a leap for many students from drawing superheroes in their notebooks to examining how gender operates in existing superhero universes. It seemed likely, too, that in this community students would be able and willing to collaborate on these kinds of projects: to share ideas, to get excited together, to plan and execute their designs.

Equity-driven collaboration

The Social Justice Academy had set itself up in the minds of its teachers and students as an alternative educational model: This school was, it was generally accepted, different from—and for most members of the community, better than—the public school alternatives in the region. At SJA, the community embraced a belief that students should be and were accepted, valued; their interests and needs respected; their individual personalities fostered instead of suppressed. Community members—students, teachers, and administrators, described an awareness that some of the rules governing activity at

SJA were not necessarily recognized by other schools or by broader society, and vice versa. Students were expected to think of themselves as activists, as critical thinkers; the rules governing SJA were designed to protect the values of mutual respect, individual freedom, and the aims of social justice and positive change. It was therefore normal, common, taken as appropriate, for students to devote energy toward determining whether a given "rule" or social norm applied locally or generally.

This was certainly true when it came to interrogating gender norms, at least for some students in the class. On the first day of the Trans*literacies intervention, I administered pre-assessments to all students. As I was collecting completed pre-assessments, a group of about seven children encircled me, wanting to ask me questions about gender. A question of particular interest to these students focused on the "rule" that if a boy hits a girl x number of times the girl is allowed to kill him. (There was some debate over whether the threshold was three or five or 10 hits.) They wanted to know: Was this a rule only in their school? Was it a societal norm? Had President Obama signed it into law? Or was it just a myth that a girl has a right to kill a boy if he hits her "too many" times?

It was not simply that students took an interest in critiquing sexist messages, however; they also embraced gender equity in many official classroom activities, as part of a practice that might be called "equity-driven collaboration." Because of the inquiry-based and collaborative nature of most classroom activities, group work and collective decision-making processes were often necessary. Students collaboratively developed agreements for how to make group decisions, and these agreements commonly emphasized democracy, acceptance of all points of view, and active and attentive

listening. Decisions were made democratically, through votes and elections; students commonly elected a chairperson to facilitate small-group discussion and report their work to the larger class or to the teachers. In general, elections appeared not to be driven by gender politics: Students simply voted for the person who they believed would be most effective at facilitating and supporting the group's needs. For example, during a Social Studies simulation on the state's elected government, the class voted for a President Pro Tempore and a Speaker of the House. The winners of each of these elections were female-assigned students, both of whom ran against at least one male classmate.

Performing alternative identities

In addition, students were commonly asked to perform an alternative identity, and many (although not all) did so with pleasure and without apparent discomfort. These alternative-identity performances focused on a range of themes: Students played short games in which they acted as sailors or ghosts or animals or alien creatures; and sometimes they performed alternative gender identities. On three consecutive days just before the start of the trans*literacies intervention Elly ran a short greeting activity during the Morning Meeting phase of the day: On day one, students greeted each other by bowing; on day two they curtsied to each other; and on day three they combined bowing and curtsying to create their own original greeting. Neither female-assigned nor male-assigned students expressed any particular discomfort with performing these traditionally gendered actions; indeed, students engaged with gusto on all three days. On another day, Elly brought a box of bow ties to class for a mathematics lesson; children chose bow ties with great enthusiasm, regardless of assigned gender, and wore them for the rest of the school day.

On another day, several months after the trans*literacies intervention had concluded, a male-assigned student expressed a desire to wear dresses in public during a conversation about gender variance and gender norms. I had previously been told of this particular student's love of feminine dress by other students, but this was the first time I had heard the student themself express this interest. As the student spoke, I watched the class carefully for discomfort, laughter, sneers, or any other signals of intolerance or rejection. I saw none. In fact, students appeared to accept their classmate's statement as if it were as common and unexceptional as if they had heard someone acknowledge they liked pencils.

In this classroom, it became clear, engagement with gender was encouraged and supported, both inside and outside of the class; students were encouraged to think about equity and act equitably; and students were comfortable violating some socially accepted gender norms. The practices of critique, of bringing-in, or working toward equitable collaboration, and of performing alternative identities emerged as relevant and important in students' efforts to embrace social justice ideals.

Routines reflecting dominant cultural norms: Sexism and gender-segregated activities

The Social Justice Academy was not a gender utopia, however; nor was the 4/5 classroom a site of rejection of all socially accepted gender norms. The classroom's embrace of antisexist values and practices existed alongside other activities that belied an acceptance of gender as a binary and an internalization of some gender norms.

What follows is a description of some of the gendered contradictions that emerged through students' activities across their school day. An embrace of antisexism emerged in competition with behaviors that erected binaristic pathways, in which female-assigned

children and male-assigned children spoke differently, engaged in different behaviors, and largely segregated themselves from the "other" gender.

Playground games and recess activities

Since SJA does not have its own schoolyard, recess is convened at a nearby park. The park offers playground equipment including swings and a jungle gym, picnic tables, and a large, open grassy area where students commonly played group games. Recess play typically separated along gender lines, in ways commonly observed among late elementary students (Riley & Jones, 2007; Thorne, 1992, 1993). Nearly all students who participated regularly in Capture the Flag and Scratch were male-assigned, with perhaps one or two female-assigned students sometimes participating as well. Female-assigned students tended to congregate away from the group game area, choosing instead to play in the playground that was in a separate area of the park. A small group of girls often used this area for playing elaborate games of make-believe in which they imitated animals or literary characters such as those from the popular Harry Potter series of books. Boys who chose not to participate in the group games sometimes organized around a kind of tag-like game built off of the television series *The Walking Dead*, which was popular among some students in the class. Other boys might join a game of tag with female classmates, conducted primarily in the playground area; and individual boys and girls, and sometimes pairs of boys and girls, would climb or sit on the jungle gym equipment.

During inclement weather, recess was convened in the classroom, and students could choose to watch a movie, play board games or computer games, read, draw, or engage in craft activities. Students commonly broke off into smaller friendship groups during indoor recess than they did when they were playing outside, and it was clear that

the vast majority of friendship groups in this classroom were single-gender. Female-assigned and male-assigned students chose to play board games or build the brightly colored rubber band jewelry that was popular during the time of the study, but they tended to do so in different places in the room. Boys often sat at tables to draw pictures, and a group of boys worked over several recess sessions on a board game that appropriated characters from the popular TV series *Doctor Who*.

During both indoor and outdoor recess, it became clear that social groups were fairly well divided into "all-boy" and "all-girl" groups. Single-sex friendship groups clustered during transition periods, as well. Before and after lunch, before school, and during transitions between subjects, students would self-organize into gender-separated clusters in open areas in the room. It was not clear whether students could articulate why so much gender-based stratification was evident in a school committed to antisexism—other than to explain that girls and boys tend to prefer different activities and different forms of play.

Students tended to agree, when asked, with the statement that boys and girls were equal; yet in informal activity, boys and girls were not simply separate; their activities were not comparable. The more active, aggressive, traditionally masculine activities were the domain of male-assigned children, while the more socially focused, "calmer" activities were the domain of female-assigned children. In this case, the stated values of the school—and the activity system of SJA—existed in contradiction with broader gendered activity systems surrounding the school. Students reflected those broader discourses about gender in their unsupervised activities.

The routines that made up classroom activity were undergirded by the school's, and the classroom's, commitment to social justice, equity, and antisexist values. The friends who made up this classroom community did not overtly question these commitments, and indeed provided signs in both word and deed that they were on board with the antisexist project. However, this commitment was laced with the gender binary: children oriented toward each other in ways that echoed traditional gender roles, and they did so from across a fairly strict and resilient boundary that separated female-assigned children from their male-assigned peers. I do not mean to suggest here that this classroom featured students taking up traditional gender roles without question. Certainly there were children who crossed this boundary; and certainly even within their single-gender groupings students behaved in ways that challenged dominant assumptions about masculinity and femininity. The teachers' commitment to explicitly addressing gender norms, most evident in the prior year's unit on gender diversity and toys, opened up opportunities for students to consider how they might engage in activities that range from traditionally feminine to traditionally masculine, and to argue that all people have the right to choose the activities they most enjoy. But overall, students largely seemed to believe that while children's *activities* may fall on a spectrum, *identities* do not: A person is either a boy or a girl, with no slippage between those identities. Given this largely unquestioning treatment of gender identity as a binary, and acceptance of some cultural norms about how girls and women, boys and men, should behave, it is probably most accurate to say that some dissonance existed between students' stated beliefs about gender and their gendered behaviors.

Study design

The three practices identified above—bringing-in-from-home, equity-focused collaboration, and performing alternative identities—served as launch points for the trans*literacies intervention. Since these practices were in regular evidence, and were treated as common, unremarkable, and normal by members of the classroom community, I theorized that they would be strong bases upon which to build a gender- and transmedia-focused intervention.

The gendered routines that were evident at my research site congealed around a general commitment to equity, social justice, and antisexism. This commitment, set forth through official policies and mission statements and operationalized by teachers in their classrooms, existed alongside classroom routines that suggested an adherence to a binaristic view of gender, along with behaviors that reified traditional gender norms. Over time, the trans*literacies project introduced *transformative events* (Wohlwend, 2009) that integrated transmedia practices with gendered routines and aimed at making visible the dissonance between beliefs and behaviors, with the goal of helping students to become more reflective of the ways in which gender operates in and on their lives.

The research questions driving this study are:

- **RQ1:** How does a curriculum focusing on gender diversity impact students' awareness of and ability to articulate the ways in which gender operates in their lives?
- **RQ2:** What shifts in transmedia practices emerge through implementation of a gender-focused curriculum that interrogates how gender is expressed and normalized across media platforms?

At the core of this dissertation is a ten-week, approximately 20-hour intervention that I have labeled the Trans*literacies Project, and that was designed to address the research questions above. The Trans*literacies Project is so called because of its emphasis on the combined literacies of gender interpretation and expression, and of transmedia analysis and creation. Transmedia and gender were treated in this study as mutually mediating mediators: I designed the intervention to support learners in engaging gender through transmedia-focused activity, and in engaging transmedia through gender-focused activity.

The intervention at the core of this study was designed using Sandoval's (2004, 2014) conjecture mapping approach to design research. Sandoval argues that this approach can effectively address two methodological concerns: The need for an "argumentative grammar" (Kelly, 2004) that makes visible the epistemological commitments of the research, and the demand for research that can simultaneously evaluate design and theory (Sandoval, 2014, pp. 19-20). The conjecture mapping approach is particularly useful for illustrating the features of an educational design that are crucial to its theoretical commitments, and for demonstrating how and why these features are linked to the learning activities, experiences, and claimed learning gains.

Often in the literature on design-based research, the process of developing and refining conjectures is represented as a means of not only addressing the "messy" realities of classroom practice (A. Collins, 1999; The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003) but also of in some ways *counteracting* the messiness in order to conduct and circulate scholarship that achieves validity and can be generalizable to broader populations. For example, Hickey at al. (2006) argue that their three-cycle approach to design-based research can maximize systemic validity and attain meaningful gains in

student achievement" (p. 182), and Bell (2004) describes what he considers the "core commitments" of design-based research in educational psychology: internal validity and generalizability. These commitments and their accompanying methods, he suggests, are strategies for minimizing the messiness of educational contexts.

Many working from the poststructuralist perspective have tilted at this particular windmill, far more eloquently and with a more sustained focus than I can or will engage here. In brief, the challenges leveled at the epistemological commitments undergirding a push toward validity and generalizability, at least at these concepts are commonly understood in educational psychology and the learning sciences, focus on questions of how to define "knowledge" and "truth," and on setting new and different goals for educational research. (For lovely discussions of these issues, see Lather (1993), Dixon and Jones (1998), and Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007)).

My sympathies, of course, lie with the poststructuralist project, and its critiques of notions of validity, reliability, generalizability, and the very idea of treating learning-based research as a "science" are wholly in line with my own commitments. Although I have chosen to adopt some aspects of the embodied conjecture approach to design research, I aim in this dissertation to do so from the ontological and epistemological commitments of my chosen theoretical frameworks.

The conjectures and embodiments that I developed during my study should not be read as clean, clear-headed, or explicitly preceding the intervention itself. In fact, the conjectures I describe below were visible in rough, fuzzy-edged form as I began my study, developed and strengthened during the intervention itself, and became far clearer after the intervention was completed.

I do not want these conjectures to be read as a cluster of post hoc fallacies, however. I aim below to balance a need for brevity and clarity with a need for detailed disclosure. The two primary commitments of this study, a commitment to gender as performative and a commitment to critical and creative engagement with gendered representations across media platforms, were in place before I set foot into the classroom. The contours of these commitments shifted during the intervention and have continued to shift as I have engaged with the process of analysis. Whatever clarity and certainty are evident below emerged through the before, during, and after process of the intervention.

Driving Principles

In this section, I describe the two driving principles that undergirded the design, implementation, and analysis of my study. Those principles are: critical engagement with gendered representations across media platforms, and treating gender as a performative endeavor. In line with Sandoval's (2014) call to build educational designs that embody the researcher's theoretical conjectures about learning, I describe the learning-focused conjectures that emerge from each principle before describing how the intervention was designed to embody those conjectures.

Principle 1: Critical engagement with gendered representations across media platforms

A great deal of prior research has established the power of media representations to influence individuals' views of a variety of social structures, including gender (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Buckingham et al., 2005; Gill, 2007; Hobbs, 2004; Kellner & Share, 2007; Kinder, 1991). Much of this work focuses on critical analysis of media messages, and media literacy education has long emphasized critiques of power and

challenges to media representation. For example, the Center for Media Literacy Education emphasizes the following Five Core Concepts of media literacy:

- All media messages are constructed.
- Media messages are constructed using creative language with its own rules.
- Different people experience the same media message differently.
- Media have embedded values and points of view.
- Most media messages are constructed to gain profit and/or power. (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p. 186)

Increasingly, teaching these five core concepts is viewed as necessary but insufficient for developing learners' media literacy skills (Buckingham, 2003; H. Jenkins, Kelley, et al., 2013). Today, students are not only consumers of media, but they are also often positioned as creators of their own media messages as well (Herrington, Hodgson, Moran, & Eidman-Aadahl, 2009; H. Jenkins, Kelley, et al., 2013); this positions them as potential participants in not simply critically analyzing the media messages they encounter but also of creating and circulating their own messages in response to or critique of these messages. Media literacy is therefore a literacy of reading *and* writing, of analyzing *and* creating media messages.

Supporting critical engagement with gendered representations across media platforms, then, requires a focus both on analyzing messages and on appropriating and remixing those messages. Since effective appropriation of media messages requires an awareness of the cultural meanings embedded in a given text or image (Horwatt, 2009; H. Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013), an emphasis on how cultural messages have developed over time is also important. Historicity is, too, a key concept for theorists of gender who

argue that the practice of "doing one's gender mindfully" requires a facility with culturally valued practices and tools that can only come with an awareness of how those practices and tools have shifted over time (Bornstein, 2013; Butler, 1997).

The principle of critical engagement with gendered representations across media platforms, then, consists of three elements:

1. Critical analysis of media messages
2. Creative appropriation of media artifacts
3. Focus on the cultural consensus around gendered representations and how this consensus has shifted over time.

From the perspective of trans* theory, it is important to highlight that the gender classifications that organize our everyday world are neither natural nor inevitable, but instead are social constructs—elaborate fictions—that guide not only how individuals theorize gender but also how they enact gender in their daily lives. I wanted to engage them in a critique of the "normals" approach to gender, first described by Garfinkel (1967). From the "normals" perspective, a person is born with one of two genders intact, and at no time in their life will they move into the other gender category (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Garfinkel's (1967) representation of the "normals" framework of gender.

At time$_1$	At time$_2$: Male	At time$_2$: Female
Male	1.0	0.0
Female	0.0	1.0

From the "normals" perspective, Garfinkel argues, the only exception to this rule is the (presumed to be exceedingly rare) case of transsexuals—freaks of nature, mutants

at birth who can prove that they were born into the wrong body and are "naturally, originally, really, after all" the opposite gender from the one they were assigned at birth (p. 167). Once the transsexual has proven that biology has played a cruel trick, they can access medical remedies for their body's mistake—and can settle in, more or less seamlessly, to their new gender category.

Teaching children about the gendered world is, however, a bit like teaching a fish to see the water ze swims in. Cultural norms about gender are so pervasive, so insidious, that they can quickly become internalized and accepted as natural law. Research has shown that children as young as three and four years old can and readily will articulate rigid, binaristic beliefs about gender roles, will intervene if they notice a peer violating these binaristic rules, and may express confusion when presented with alternatively gendered models (Davies, 1989; Martin, 1998, 2009). That confusion is precisely what I hoped to achieve, in the name of throwing into disarray students' acceptance of the "normals" approach.

Transmedia narratives can offer alternatives to dominant social frameworks. Because they draw on the semiotics of contemporary culture in order to present alternative worlds (Lemke, 2009; Scolari, 2009b), they can conjure a sense of dissonance in the viewer: It's as if the words make sense, but the syntax is unfamiliar. In this way, their alternative frameworks are simultaneously fantastical, tinged with magic, and highly feasible depictions that enable us to reenvision our social world.

Conjecture: Critical engagement with gendered representations can be supported through critical and creative activities that support a deepening awareness of the cultural value of these representations. In order to support learners in challenging the dominant

gender framework, I chose transmedia narratives that offer alternative gender frameworks that either presented the experiences of gender variant individuals or presented a world in which dominant views of gender are subverted. These kinds of narratives are far more common than many might assume, in the fictional worlds of manga/anime series such as *Ranma ½* and *Wandering Son* and in popular television series including *Glee* and *Degrassi*; and in the nonfictional accounts of families, schools, and communities that adopt alternative approaches to theorizing gender. For example, many media outlets have been fascinated by efforts to raise a "genderless child"; newspapers, magazines, and television shows have been devoted to tracing the efforts of parents to conceal the biological sex of their children in order to avoid assigning them a gender and accompanying stereotypical gender roles (Koplewica, 2011).

In these narratives it is perfectly reasonable, for example, for a young boy to fall into a cursed pond that causes him to magically turn into a girl every time he is doused with hot water and a boy every time he is doused with cold water (Ranma ½). It is possible to conceive of a world dominated by asexual reproduction, as in the Namek species featured in the manga and anime series *Dragon Ball Z*. It is possible, confoundingly, for parents to collude with pediatricians and school officials to avoid assigning a gender to their child.

Since a key aspect of this principle is supporting learners in tracing the development of norms that are today treated as fixed, unchangeable, and "natural," I also aimed to draw on media representations that demonstrated shifts in gendered narratives. Several websites are devoted to tracing the popularity of various names; a user can input a name and view its popularity among male-assigned and female-assigned babies over

time. A reader can analyze the story that is told about gender by party supply websites, which commonly divide their inventory into "boys' party supplies" and "girls' party supplies." These and similar narratives, communicated through multiple semiotic modes, offer insights both into how gender operates in our current culture and how it could have been—and could some day be—otherwise. I chose to work with these types of narratives, and to integrate activities in which students appropriated and remixed these narratives in order to develop their own creative gender messages, in order to support learners in developing a critical perspective toward dominant norms about gender.

Principle 2: Treating gender as a performative endeavor

The performative nature of gender is a key principle of trans* theory, and it is also a key element of gender fluency. As I have discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, the trans*theoretical perspective on gender holds it to be an interactional affair constructed through the interplay of societal norms as they come into contact with physical bodies whose traits are inscribed with meaning by those norms; and by socially inscribed bodies colliding with other bodies and cultural artifacts in local interactions. All individuals begin to learn from a very young age how to vary their gender expression to account for context. In a football game, for example, physical aggression is expected and appropriate, whereas in a Thursday evening community softball league physical aggression may be prohibited by league rules. A male-assigned individual may wear a dress for theater or for comedy, but not for comfort on a construction site.

In this sense, all individuals vary their performance of gender; indeed, many have characterized gender identity not as a stable, fixed position but the accretion of multiple

gendered positions taken up across contexts and over time (Bornstein, 2013; Britzman, 1998; J. Butler, 2004). We learn to follow the rules of gender performance by violating them and having our "mistakes" pointed out by others; in this sense, the experience of having our gender policed is also a shared, common experience.

I am by no means advocating a "We are all CeCe MacDonald" perspective, of course. Although all of us have experienced gender policing and have exhibited gender variance, the majority of individuals will never identify as trans*, will never undertake medical interventions to align their physical characteristics to their felt gender identities, will never run the risk of verbal, physical, and sexual assault for walking while trans, will never risk being murdered and mutilated by the people who are policing their gender performances. These are the provenance of those who are visibly gender variant, not of those who have run up against the various norms and expectations for performing "normal" gender.

I am, however, advocating for a stance that rejects the idea that gender variance is the provenance of freaks and mutants—a common belief held by many members of American culture.

Conjectures: Gender fluency can be developed through:

1. *Performance activities in which learners adopt and reflect on a range of identity positions can enable them to see more clearly how gender identities are performed and the resources that are appropriated to do so; and*
2. *Critical and creative reflections on personal experiences with varying one's gender and with having those variances monitored by others can help*

learners develop an increased awareness of the universality of gender variance.

I integrated alternatively gendered transmedia worlds in order to introduce students to the notion that assumptions about gender that are taken for granted are in fact up for debate. I wanted, too, to demonstrate that this is not just a theoretical point: It is not only the case that alternative gender models exist, but also that many people in their everyday lives are offering and experiencing variations from the "normals" approach to gender. As I note elsewhere, gender is viewed from the perspective of queer/trans* theory as a range of possible identity positions, and a person's gender identity is viewed as the accretion of multiple gendered positions taken on across contexts over time (Walter Bockting, Benner, & Coleman, 2009; Bornstein, 1994; Britzman, 1998).

Gender variance, from this perspective, is a common and shared experience—and one that inherently challenges the "normals" view of gender as fixed, stable, and unchanging over time. A direct challenge to the "normals" view is necessary because the normals approach has given rise to a discursive move that frames transgenderism as the provenance of freaks and outliers (Gamson, 2001), and treats gender variance as foreign, unfamiliar, and threatening to the social order (Judith Butler, 2004; Sycamore, 2010).

Queer/trans* theory holds that children are innately queer, in the sense that they have not yet internalized the social constructs of gender and sexuality—they learn the rules by violating them (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004b; Levine, 2002; Martinson, 1994). I theorized that students in my research site had experienced moments of gender policing, and conjectured that offering opportunities for them to share their histories would enable them to develop an awareness that gender variance is a common, shared experience.

Gender-as-performance can be broken into two aspects:

1. Gender and its expression are evident in individual performances of identity that draw on gendering resources—cultural tools, gesture and body language, and modes of personal expression—to communicate a gendered identity to others (Bornstein, 2013; Butler, 1993; J. Butler, 2004; Sycamore, 2010; E. Taylor, 2010). The resources available for communicating a gendered identity reflect societal norms about gender, but they also vary widely in local contexts.
2. Because of the varied, context-depending forms that gender performance can take, all individuals adopt a range of gendered identity positions across context and time, and gender variance can therefore be viewed not only as a common, shared experience but also as a normal and important aspect of gender fluency (Bornstein, 1994; E. Shapiro, 2007; Sycamore, 2010).

Mapping principles and conjectures to the trans*literacies curriculum

The chart below identifies the six primary features of the trans*literacies curriculum and maps these features to the conjectures they were designed to embody. The principles and conjectures, which are described in greater detail above, are summarized in the table below.

Table 2: Alignment of principles, conjectures, and features of the trans*literacies intervention. Features, listed in the right-hand column, are organized in chronological order.

Principles	***Conjectures***	***Features***
1: Critical engagement with gendered representations across media platforms	1.1: Critical analysis of media messages	Dinner Party
	1.2: Creative appropriation of media artifacts	Gender Collage
	1.3: Focus on the cultural consensus around gendered representations and how this consensus has shifted over time.	Critical Literacy Invitations
2: Treating gender as a performative endeavor and gender variance as a common, shared experience	2.1: Performance-based activities (consciously adopting multiply gendered positions)	History Trace / Media Analysis
	2.2: Critical reflection (collecting data about gendervariant experiences)	Gender Line Activity
		Envisioning the Future: Gender in 2125

The Curriculum: Gender Diversity and Transmedia

In line with Sandoval's (2014) conjecture mapping approach, each feature of the curriculum was mapped to the conjectures it was designed to embody. The curricular features comprising the trans*literacies unit are described below.

The unit drew on the "origins" throughline and was guided by the following driving questions, which Elly and I co-developed as we shaped the unit:

- Where did gender norms come from? How do they impact us today? What changes can we see in gender? Where are we going?
- What is gained and lost when rules about gender operate in our lives?
- How does knowing the origins of gender call me to action?

The elements of the intervention are described briefly below, and all curricular materials are included alongside the descriptions.

Activity 1: Dinner Party

The first activity of the unit was mapped to the conjecture 2.1, learning about the performative nature of gender through performance-based activities (consciously adopting multiply gendered positions). The dinner party activity, adapted from Bornstein's (2013) gender workbook, was an improvisational activity in which students took on the personas of famous historical, literary, and popular culture characters. As I note above, this classroom community commonly engaged in the practice of performing alternative identities, and I wanted to offer an activity that focused more explicitly on performing alternatively gendered identities. I chose to start with this activity in order to ground the unit in concrete experiences of varying one's gender performance. This activity also overtly embraces the queer/trans*theoretical approach that treats gender as a

complex interaction between societal norms, local contexts, and the conversion of physical traits into expression. Bornstein's text, designed for use by a non-academic audience, includes many exercises designed to help readers explore the ways in which they perform gender across contexts; she embraces a poststructuralist approach that views gender identity as a compilation of multiple performances and identity positions. Explaining her position on identity, she writes:

> Identities are real. They cast shadows on us, and we cast the shadow of our identities on others. Identity is something we all seem to need or cling to—something we all know how to perform, mindfully or otherwise.
>
> I think it's a fact that identities, being false, require other identities to validate them—and that includes but isn't limited to gender identity. Some people's gender expressions trigger us into changing our own. Here's how that works. When we shift our gender expression to accommodate the gender expression of another, we've essentially shed an identity and put another in its place. And we all do this more or less unconsciously when we're in the company of different people. (pg. 114)

To demonstrate how identity performances shift to accommodate another person's gender expression, she offers the "dinner party" exercise. Although a more detailed description of this exercise is included in the appendix of curricular materials, the exercise, briefly, asks the reader to identify nine people "who perform their default identities differently from how you perform your default identity" (p. 114). Then the reader is instructed to think of an amusing and embarrassing incident that has happened in their life and to imagine telling one sentence of it to each person, as if all of them were together at a dinner party.

The Dinner Party activity was modified to account for the age and anticipated diversity of gender fluency among students, the fact of its implementation in a formal classroom setting (instead of its use as a tool for thought, completed individually), and its location as the first activity in a gender diversity unit. Because the activity highlighted the

role of performance, it was decided that it should be implemented in the students' performing arts class, which is taught as a standalone subject outside of the students' regular classroom. The dinner party activity was comprised of the following elements:

1. Students brainstormed a list of people from history, literature, and popular culture; the teacher and I culled these to include a shorter list of people who we believed to be familiar to the majority of the class.
2. The names were written on index cards and placed in a hat, and students who volunteered drew a name and sat at a table decorated with a tablecloth and dinnerware. The index card they drew served as a place card that reminded other partygoers and audience members of their identities.
3. Students adopted the persona they had drawn and performed as if they were at a dinner party with 4-5 other celebrities, also drawn from the hat and played by classmates.
4. Upon completion of the activity, students completed a brief piece of writing in which they reflected on the experience of performing as variously gendered celebrities and of watching their classmates do the same.

The dinner party activity, then, served to prime students for thinking about gender without providing them guidance on *how* to think about gender. I hypothesized that this would be generative in the sense that students who had not considered gender previously would have a recent gender-focused experience upon which to draw as they responded to the questions.

Activity 2: Gender collage

This activity was designed to embody conjecture 1.2, critical engagement with gendered media representations through creative appropriation of media artifacts. By drawing on multimodal objects culled from a variety of popular magazines, I theorized, students would be able to make visible their heretofore tacit awareness of how gender operated across cultural institutions.

In the gender collage activity, students worked singly or in pairs to create a collage that represented their understanding of gender. They were provided with scissors, construction paper, glue, and magazines including issues of Time, Sports Illustrated, home decoration magazines, and teen fashion and pop culture magazines. We did not provide directions about whether students' collages should represent how *they* understood gender or how gender norms or stereotypes exist in the world, although in the whole-class debrief we did ask them to position their collage in this manner.

Students were given only one constraint: They were not allowed to include any faces in their collages. This constraint was intended to encourage students to consider not only other forms of gender representation in the magazines they were provided but also to consider alternative methods of depicting gender in their collages.

Activity 3: Critical Literacy Invitations

Because the practice of bringing-in-from-home was so common across the classroom community, it seemed productive to convert this practice into an officially sanctioned classroom activity. The critical literacy invitations approach was designed as an embodiment of conjecture 1.1: critical engagement with gendered media representations through critical analysis of media messages. Students participated in

critical literacy invitations (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008; Van Sluys, 2005) three times during the unit; these invitations were designed to target specific gender-related issues across media contexts and to support learners in examining transmedia representations of gender. The invitations genre is designed to support collaborative inquiry into an issue of shared interest, in order to foster the following dimensions of critical literacy: (a) disrupting the commonplace, (b) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (c) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (d) taking action and promoting social justice (Van Sluys et al., 2006, p. 198). Invitations typically include a brief overview of a topic or issue, guiding questions, an anchor text that addresses the topic, and suggested projects for students to complete—although students are encouraged to develop and execute their own project ideas as well.

Since the invitations focused on issues the students had identified as of interest to them, they were by design intended to support learners in examining how they encountered gender in one area of intense non-academic interest. Topics included superheroes, *The Hunger Games*, fairy tales, children's books, and party supplies, and other similar topics; these are described in greater detail in the appendix materials. Critical literacy invitations were designed to highlight dominant assumptions about the "rules" of gender, and to facilitate conversations about how those rules might have been, and could be, otherwise. I wanted also to invite students to understand the ways in which people regularly violate the rules in large and small ways. I wanted them to explore their own experiences of varying their gender expression across contexts, and to consider how these experiences of gender variance challenge and disrupt societal norms.

A collaborative effort with Elly and an older student at SJA who had participated in invitations in his previous school led to the following gender-focused invitations topics:

- Board books
- Color
- Dr. Seuss
- Fast food
- Happily Ever After
- Hunger Games
- Inventors
- Toys
- Monsters
- Party Supplies
- Names
- A World Without Gender
- Superheroes

The specific details of each topic, and its connection to larger themes of gender, gender diversity, and cultural norms surrounding gender, are included in the appendix of this dissertation.

Activity 4: History trace: gender across media

This activity was designed to map to conjecture 1.1: critical engagement with gendered media representations through critical analysis of media messages.

The goal of this activity was to invite students to consider both how representations of gender have changed over time and the role of media platforms in communicating these shifting representations. Seeing shifting norms about gender can help students develop a sense of the socially constructed nature of gender and gender norms. Students viewed and analyzed commercials selling one popular toy, Legos. This

toy was chosen because of its popularity among students in the class, and because of the ease of access to more than 60 years of television commercials.

The history trace was a critical media literacy activity. It emphasized the shifting representations of gender and the shifting depictions of how boys and girls play with Legos, engage with their family, and express themselves across several decades. As we moved through history to commercials students had seen on television recently, I asked them to consider how the commercials convinced or failed to convince them that a particular Lego set was made for them. This was intended to emphasize that particular decisions about how to represent gender impact viewers' beliefs not only about gender, but about what types of products are appropriate for their assigned gender category.

Activity 5: Gender Line

This activity was designed to embody conjecture 2.2: Learning about the performative nature of gender through critical reflection on gender variance (collecting data about gendervariant experiences). The activity aimed to highlight the experience of dissonance in how students understood themselves and how they were perceived by others. This dissonance focused explicitly on gender expression, asking students to identify moments in their lives when their gender identity or gender expressions were perceived as violating societal norms. In this sense, it targeted the principles of gender variance as a common, shared experience, and the emphasis on critical data collection.

The gender line (fig. 9 below) was a tool devised in the previous academic year by Elly and another teacher to help students conceive of gender as a continuum and not as a binary; it looks like this:

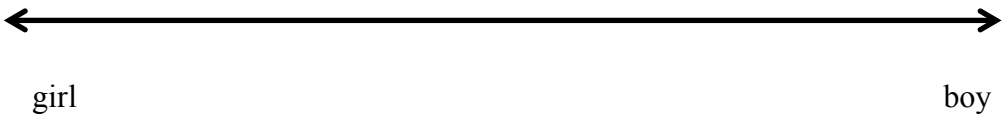


Figure 10: The gender line, used during the previous school year to emphasize that gender is a continuum and not a binary.

In the previous year, the gender line had been used to help students consider the ways in which toys, television shows, and games are marketed for either boys or girls; students placed items such as My Little Pony and the popular recess game Capture the Flag on the gender line to indicate their understanding of how each was constructed as more feminine or more masculine. This activity primarily supported critical analysis of marketing tactics. Elly and I wanted to build on the work of the previous year by using the gender line to help students consider the ways in which their own behaviors, activities, and appearance choices reflect multiple gendered identity positions, and that these positions are at times understood differently by their peers, family members, and adults.

The gender line activity actually included two lines: One intended to represent how students saw their own behaviors and one intended to represent how their behaviors would be interpreted by others. Students were instructed to identify three times when they have experienced what Elly labeled "dissonance" between how they understood what they were doing and how it was interpreted by others. Students wrote their experiences on post-it notes, two copies of each experience, then placed one copy of each item on each line, according to whether they thought it fell more on the girls' side (right) or boys' side (left). The top line was the "your experience" line, and the bottom line was the "what the world thinks" line.

Activity 6: Gender in 2125

The final project of the trans*literacies intervention was a creative project in which students were prompted to consider the future of gender. This activity was designed to embody conjectures 1.1 and 1.2, because students were encouraged both to critique contemporary cultural messages about gender and to develop their own conjectures about how the world will change in response to this critique. In doing so, I aimed to support learners in developing a simultaneously critical and creative response to dominant gender norms.

The activity itself was inspired by 826 Valencia's "Hello From the Future" project (http://www.theboldditalic.com/articles/4116-what-will-san-francisco-look-like-100-years-from-now-), in which students in San Francisco imagined their city 100 years in the future. In the "Gender in 2125" project, students were invited to consider how gender changes by the year 2125, choosing one area of social life to explore. Working in pairs, they created a pair of posters, one representing the current state of affairs and one representing the year 2125; and they were required to write a paragraph describing each poster.

Data Analysis

As I note above, data analysis coincided with the beginning of data collection for this study. In this chapter, I have detailed how I drew on collected data to identify routine, commonplace practices related to media and gender; I also described my approach to choosing students to follow more closely as possible case studies for this dissertation. I aimed for triangulation using video data and field notes and memos, written and

multimodal artifacts collected from students, and debrief and analysis sessions with Elly and Rick in order to offer defensible claims about the nature of classroom activity.

The process of establishing and articulating gender-focused and media-focused routines was ongoing throughout the unit. In addition to fine-tuning my understanding and identification of these routines, I also focused on curating my collected data in order to address my research questions. Below, I describe my approach to addressing each of the two questions that drove my study design and implementation.

- **RQ1:** How does a curriculum integrating a trans*theoretical framework impact students' awareness of and ability to articulate the ways in which gender operates in their lives?

The primary data source for interpreting students' shifts in awareness of and ability to articulate the ways in which gender operates in their lives was in students' talk about gender across the unit. Conversation about any new media artifact—commercial, advertisement, website, collage, etc.—followed a fairly consistent pattern: Elly would often begin by displaying the artifact and asking students, "What do you notice?" Following this, students would be encouraged to offer their thoughts about the artifact and to make connections with what previous students had said. I traced student utterances for shifts in content and focus, considering in particular how their utterances made visible underlying theories about what gender is and how it operates in their lives and in society.

I also examined student-generated artifacts for messages about gender, focusing in particular on four benchmark projects: The dinner party activity, the gender collage, the Legos history trace activity, and the final project in which students envisioned the future of gender. These projects were chosen because they were cross-referenced to the

three dominant aspects of gender fluency: critical, creative, and performance-based engagement with gender. In tracing student activity across these projects, I focused on how each enabled different forms of engagement with gender, and how these forms of engagement supported students in expanding or shifting their awareness of gender.

Finally, I drew on student responses to the pre- and post-assessment in order to develop a sense of how students' articulation of issues related to gender, gender equality, and gender expression shifted over time. Although I could have used these responses to offer an analysis of individual students, I was more interested in developing an interpretation of shifts across the classroom community. My theoretical and methodological frameworks emphasize knowledge as distributed across a community and learning as the product of working toward a shared, negotiated object. In order to understand how that shared object was constructed, and how it shifted over time, I needed primarily to consider whole-group shifts in thinking.

- **RQ2:** What shifts in transmedia practices emerge through implementation of a gender-focused curriculum that interrogates how gender is expressed and normalized across media platforms?

My primary data source for addressing this question focused on interactions or student-generated artifacts that explicitly drew on or interrogated one or more transmedia narratives. To develop an interpretation of shifts in transmedia practices over time, I traced not only narratives that were repeatedly referenced (such as *Doctor Who* and *My Little Pony*) but also *how* and *when* transmedia narratives came into play. For example, students often introduced fictional television shows or novels as examples to support a

theory of gender, and I considered how these narratives were integrated in conversation and what points they were introduced to support.

Details about my analytic methods and decisions about which cases to present are discussed in each of the findings chapters that follow (chapters 4-6).

Chapter Four

Shifting Representations of Gender

This chapter focuses on efforts within the trans*literacies unit to support learners in engaging critically with gendered media representations. This engagement focused both on critical analysis of media messages and on creative appropriation and remix of these messages. In this chapter, I will describe shifts in students' patterns of engaging with gendered media representations. As I will discuss below, initial patterns tended to reflect dominant cultural beliefs about gender—including viewing gender as a binary and relying on archetypes to describe gender identities and gender expression. Later in the unit, student work demonstrated increased reflection on and critique of dominant cultural norms surrounding gender. In offering these reflections and critique, students engaged in appropriation and remixing of media artifacts.

Gender representations and new media literacies practices

Although "critical" engagement has been a centerpiece of media literacy education for at least the last three decades (Hobbs, 1998, 2004), recent scholarship in media studies and education has emphasized the importance of supporting critical *and* creative engagement with media (H. Jenkins, Kelley, et al., 2013; Kafai & Peppler, 2011; Livingstone, 2008; Rheingold, 2008) in order to prepare learners for fuller engagement in an increasingly participatory culture (H. Jenkins, Clinton, K., Purushotma, R., Robinson, A.J., & Weigel, M., 2009). This is viewed as not simply a matter of preparing learners for academic and workplace success, although practices such as ethical appropriation of media artifacts and facility with picking up and working with new technologies have been shown to support learners in school and at work (Dede, Korte, Nelson, Valdez, &

Ward, 2005; Hull & Greeno, 2006). The development of both critical and creative skills are also viewed as increasingly essential for supporting learners who are living, learning, and working in cultures whose values, interests, and paradigms for building and understanding what constitutes a full, happy, and satisfying life are increasingly shaped by corporate interests (Apple, 2006; Croteau & Hoynes, 2006; Dyck & Zingales, 2002; Giroux, 2000; Gorlewski, 2011; McChesney & Nichols, 2002; Soley, 2002). From this perspective, it is viewed as imperative that learners be taught not only that they *can* write and circulate their own stories, their own messages, but also that they *should* do so when dominant messages either omit representations of their experiences or circulate messages that are inaccurate or harmful to them or to others(Alexander & Cagle, 2004; Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Santo, 2011).

Transmedia messages—and especially mainstream media messages on television, in film, and in advertising—are infamous for their limited and problematic portrayals of diverse lives and identities (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014). When it comes to gender, media messages overwhelmingly rely on not only the binary paradigm but also on stereotypes and archetypes of what constitutes femininity and masculinity (Gauntlett, 2008; Gill, 2007; Gross, 1991; Pollen, 2011; F. Taylor, 2003; J. P. Young, 2001). That these messages about gender are both pervasive and deeply persuasive is well established in scholarship in media studies and education (Carter & Steiner, 2003; Gauntlett, 2008; Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014; Rouner et al., 2003). An instructional approach that incorporates both critical and creative engagement with these messages can help learners to develop a more robust awareness that media representations are constructed by others who may not be working in their own best interests (Hobbs, 1998); to feel empowered to

create and circulate their own messages (Alper & Herr-Stephenson, 2013; H. Jenkins, Kelley, et al., 2013); and to use this power to challenge problematic discourses about the cultures in which they live (Alexander & Cagle, 2004; Apperley, 2007; Buckingham, 2003).

In the trans*literacies intervention, these goals were framed in terms of helping learners to identify and critique binaristic representations of gender, to identify the ways in which these representations can shape harmful and inaccurate views of gender and gender identity, and to craft new messages that offered a broader representation of the diverse ways in which gender is and could be experienced in individuals' lives. Two activities in the unit—the gender collage project and the media analysis activity—were designed to systematically move students toward these goals. These activities were treated as benchmark activities to identifying students' beliefs about gender, ability to critique media messages about gender, and ability to develop creative responses to those messages. (An additional ongoing activity, critical literacy invitations, was designed as a support for this goal but was not used as a benchmark for gauging students' movement in these areas and therefore will not be discussed in detail in this chapter.)

The two benchmark activities, and findings that emerged from them, are discussed below.

Benchmark 1: The gender collage activity

> *"…and then I cut off the head and left the body for the girl."*
>
> *--Andrew, describing his creative decisions in crafting a collage representing his view of gender*

The gender collage activity was the first "official" activity of the trans*literacies unit. By this, I mean that the activity was the first to be presented by the teachers to the students with clear instructions and a final artifact that students were required to submit at the end of the class session. The activity was designed with multiple goals in mind. I wanted to collect evidence of students' initial views of gender, in order to gain a sense of how they were representing and talking about gender at the beginning of the unit. I also wanted to use this activity to frame the goals of the unit—to establish that in this unit, students would be expected and required to critique stereotypes and to work creatively to develop new messages about gender. Most importantly, I wanted to use this activity to establish a key premise: That problematic gender stereotypes are everywhere and that they are fair game for critique and challenge.

As I noted in chapter 3, this classroom had developed a culture of bringing-in-from-home. The practices that fell under the umbrella of bringing-in-from-home included creative appropriation and remix. Students created a game based on the BBC series Doctor Who, they drew pictures of characters from The Hunger Games and Harry Potter, and they found creative ways of inserting their favorite song lyrics into classroom activities. Elly and I felt confident that a collage-based activity would be highly productive: Students would be excited to craft collages, and they would use the opportunity to develop creative representations. Students were instructed to develop what we called a "gender collage" using magazines, scissors, card stock and glue, and working in pairs or groups of three. (Students were permitted to choose their groups, and a few students were allowed to work alone.)

The material aspects of this project mediated students' activity in important ways. First, the magazines we chose to distribute to students tended toward binary representations of gender. We offered copies of *Sports Illustrated* and *Time* Magazine, in addition to a variety of home décor magazines and teen pop and fashion magazines. Because these are mass marketed magazines designed for a general readership, they tend to rely on the most common and most dominant stereotypes about gender, femininity and masculinity (Bishop, 2003; Durham, 2003; Fink & Kensicki, 2002). They are also types of magazines that the children in my study were likely to have encountered outside of the classroom, and were therefore more likely to be viewed as unremarkable, "normal" kinds of magazines. This was important for emphasizing the key premise of this activity: That gender stereotypes are prevalent and open ground for critique.

Students were instructed in this activity to create a collage that represents gender—their own view or society's view. In one sense, the magazines I chose offered a limited set of images from which to draw in order to create this representation, since the pages were replete with masculine, aggressive men and feminine, motherly women. However, a key principle driving this intervention is that gender is everywhere—it is not only bodies but also cultural artifacts, products, colors, shapes, and words that are imbued with gender. I wanted to use this activity to direct students toward the *other* places where gender resides, and I did so by adding an explicit constraint: Students were not permitted to include any faces in their collages. This constraint was designed because faces are the easiest repository for gender—the place that people, including children, often assume is the central site for expressing gender and perceiving the gender of others (Brown &

Perrett, 1993; Merritt & Kok, 1995). Yet gender and gender norms are expressed through a wide range of cultural resources, including but not limited to the body (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014; F. Taylor, 2003; Wohlwend, 2012a); and research shows that gender attribution—the process of perceiving another human and determining that person's gender—is a complex affair built off of interpretation of a multitude of physiological, aural, and gestural cues (Bornstein, 2013; Kessler & McKenna, 1978). In the colors, design, and organization of other culturally meaningful images and symbols. One reason multimodal advertising is so effective at communicating gender norms is that is integrates subtle and overt messages about gender into its efforts to sell cars, technologies, hygiene products, food, lifestyles, and so on (Carter & Steiner, 2003; Gauntlett, 2008; Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014).

Students spent a good deal of time negotiating this constraint: They asked if they could include the faces of animals and cartoon characters (we allowed this); they juxtaposed other items where people's faces would be; they focused intently on making precise cuts so that they could omit a face but include every other part of a body.

Gender collage and contradictions of use

The stated object of this activity was: "make a collage that represents your understanding of gender." Students were provided with scissors, glue, and mainstream magazines as tools for achieving this object. These resources—and particularly the magazines that were chosen for this activity—foregrounded a key contradiction: The images included in the pages of mainstream magazines are designed to reinforce, not to challenge, binaristic gender norms (Gill, 2007).

This contradiction was highlighted by the question "does this collage represent your own thinking or others' thinking about gender?" To create their collages, students drew on cultural resources that generally enacted dominant messages about gender. In many ways, students were constrained by the tools available to them for completing this project—a point that was highlighted both in the patterns that emerged across students' finished collages and in the language students used to describe their work. In the next sections, I discuss the patterns and talk surrounding the gender collage activity, to highlight how the activity made visible to students the contradictions inherent in appropriating cultural artifacts to represent equitable perspectives on gender.

Patterns in finished collages

Students spent nearly an hour working on their collages; in total, students submitted 23 completed, on-topic collages. (I considered a collage complete if it included more than one image and if images covered at least half of the cardstock. By these criteria, 23 complete collages, one off-topic collage, and three incomplete collages were submitted; the incomplete collages included 1-4 images and more than 50% of each was comprised of blank, uncollaged cardstock. One additional collage featured images of horses, with no clear message related to gender; the creator of this collage was a student with a documented cognitive delay that may have prevented them from completing the activity as instructed.

Several patterns emerged across the collages; these are described below.

Pattern 1: Gender as binary. Of the 23 collages, 11 included a clear, visible boundary separating the cardstock into two discrete parts: Male and female, or boy and

girl, or man and woman. Of those 11 collages, eight placed the “male” side on the left, if the collage was organized horizontally, or at the top, if the collage was organized vertically. This is not a trivial detail: In cultures driven by languages that read left-to right and top-to-bottom, the top and left-hand sides are privileged positions in students’ representations (Tversky, Kugelmass, & Winter, 1991).

Several examples of this approach to the collage are included below (Figure 11), followed by an analysis of one representative collage, 1c, which I am calling the “T Chart” collage. I’ve chosen this collage because it employs several common tactics, including a visible boundary with textual demarcations of the “boy” and “girl” sides of the collage. It also incorporates sports and animal imagery, two prominent classes of images across the collages.

Figure 11: Three collages representing the "gender as binary" approach. Collage 1c will be discussed at greater length below.

"Boy | Girl": The T Chart

Collage 1c was submitted without any names attached, and I was never able to determine which student or students submitted it. I chose to include an analysis of this collage regardless of this, because it was a strong representation of many key features of the gender-binary style that many students chose to incorporate into their collages. Because I was unable to meet with the creator(s) of this collage or to base my interpretations on what might be considered extraneous–or at least extratextual—details such as the student's assigned gender or prior or later engagement with gender during the unit, I treat the collage itself as a stand-alone artifact and offer an analysis that draws on literary analytic and multimodal analytic traditions. An ongoing and lively debate across the social sciences has engaged the question of whether it is appropriate to cleave authorial intent from any given artifact, and what can be gained or lost when artifactual analysis sets aside (or does not or cannot ascertain) the creator of the artifact in question (e.g., Bazerman, 2004; Malinowski, 2008; Thomas, 1994). Certainly it is impossible to determine how a given artifact represent an individual's thinking about a given concept or set of concepts when the author of the artifact is not present—although many have argued that it is always problematic to attribute intentionality to an author, even when the author is known, and even when the author states their intent overtly (Nelson, Hull, & Roche-Smith, 2008). Thomas (1994) argues that content analysis should, and does, focus on making interpretations about cultural meaning and not about individual cognition.

I hope here to make two convincing arguments: That the authorless collage I refer to as "Boy | Girl" makes visible culturally valued ways of thinking about gender, and that these frameworks for thinking about gender are represented across many of the collages.

Collage 1c, “Boy|Girl,” is organized on a square of light blue cardstock, with a strip of colored paper stretching vertically across the center of the cardstock and images clustered to the left and to the right of that strip beneath the headings “boy” and “girl.” This collage is organized as a T chart, with headings at the top and items arranged in a roughly list-like structure; the viewer is therefore invited to interpret this collage as a comparative table, reading from top to bottom and left to right as one commonly does when interpreting a T chart.

The collage also exhibits a symmetry and organizational grammar that invites the viewer to seek relationships across the divide. As is common across the binary-divided collages, the “boy” side is placed in the privileged, left-hand position, with the “girl” side on the right. The “boy” side of the chart gives prominence to the word “sports,” placed at the top center of the list; this emphasis is underscored with the image immediately below the word “sports”—the mascot for the Erie Otters, a junior ice hockey team. In the next row, three items—a tie, an icon indicating a men’s restroom, and a television with the phrase “the boy show” written very lightly across the screen—create an arc above an obviously, if not exceptionally, masculine body dressed as if for golf or a similar leisure sport.

By comparison, the “girl” side includes no words at all. In place of the “sports” caption, the “girl” side features a cluster of animals: A wolflike animal howling with its pups, a cartoon dog and cat appropriated from an advertisement for a pet insurance company, and a young Siberian husky. In case the viewer is unclear on how to interpret this group of images, they are underscored by two images of red hearts positioned directly beneath the animals; this pairing suggests affection for animals as a key feature

of the "girl" side of the poster. Below the hearts, a bookshelf filled with books is aligned to the position where, on the opposite ("boy") side, a television monitor is placed; and instead of a male body rounding out the scene, the "girl" side finishes off with an image of flowers in a vase. The flower shape is approximately symmetrical to the shape of the male body on the left, with the flowers standing tall and stems stretching out and to the left.

Within each category, gender can be summarized as follows: Boys=sports, technology, masculine bodies; girls=animals, affection, literature, flowers. These messages in themselves reflect dominant beliefs about the differences between boys and girls; the message becomes even more interesting when viewed as a comparison, as the t-chart structure invites.

The collage includes several images that repeat on each side of the binary. Two particularly visible repeated images are of animals—a sports mascot on the "boy" side and cuddly housepets on the "girl" side—and of media—television for boys and books for girls. The message of this collage, then, may be that the same objects have different uses depending on one's gender. Animals can be a symbol of masculinity and athleticism…or they can be a symbol of sweetness and love. Media can be high-tech and can target you directly, if you're a boy…or media can be low-tech, silent, and nameless, if you're a girl. If you're a boy, you are symbolized by your body; if you're a girl, you are symbolized by flowers, which themselves are a symbol of romance and beauty.

Pattern 2: Reliance on gender archetypes. Another common pattern across the collages was a reliance on artchetypal representations of gender. Archetypes of

masculinity tend to privilege "courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body" (P. Sexton, cited in Robert W Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 644); feminine archetypes emphasize beauty, sensuality, sexual passivity, and motherhood (Kaler, 1990; Kaplan, 1994). Archetypes of gender abound in media; as Kaler (1990) points out, "(a)ny work of popular culture is successful as long as it replicates a psychological pattern of completeness" (p. 49)—this is as true for television shows and film as it is for advertising, which relies on familiarity to draw potential consumers.

Taken as a whole, the collages present a fairly consistent message that pairs masculinity with athleticism, aggression, and toughness, while femininity is associated with beauty, sexiness, and passive romanticism. Student collages drew on archetypal images to represent masculinity and femininity, rarely straying from dominant cultural beliefs about gender (although some exceptions will be discussed later in this chapter). Those archetypes were clustered around some broader themes, as the table below illustrates. I clustered the images included in all of the completed collages and classified them according to the categories listed below (Table 3); the table organizes these in descending order of frequency.

Table 3: Themes employed across the gender collage, organized in descending order of frequency

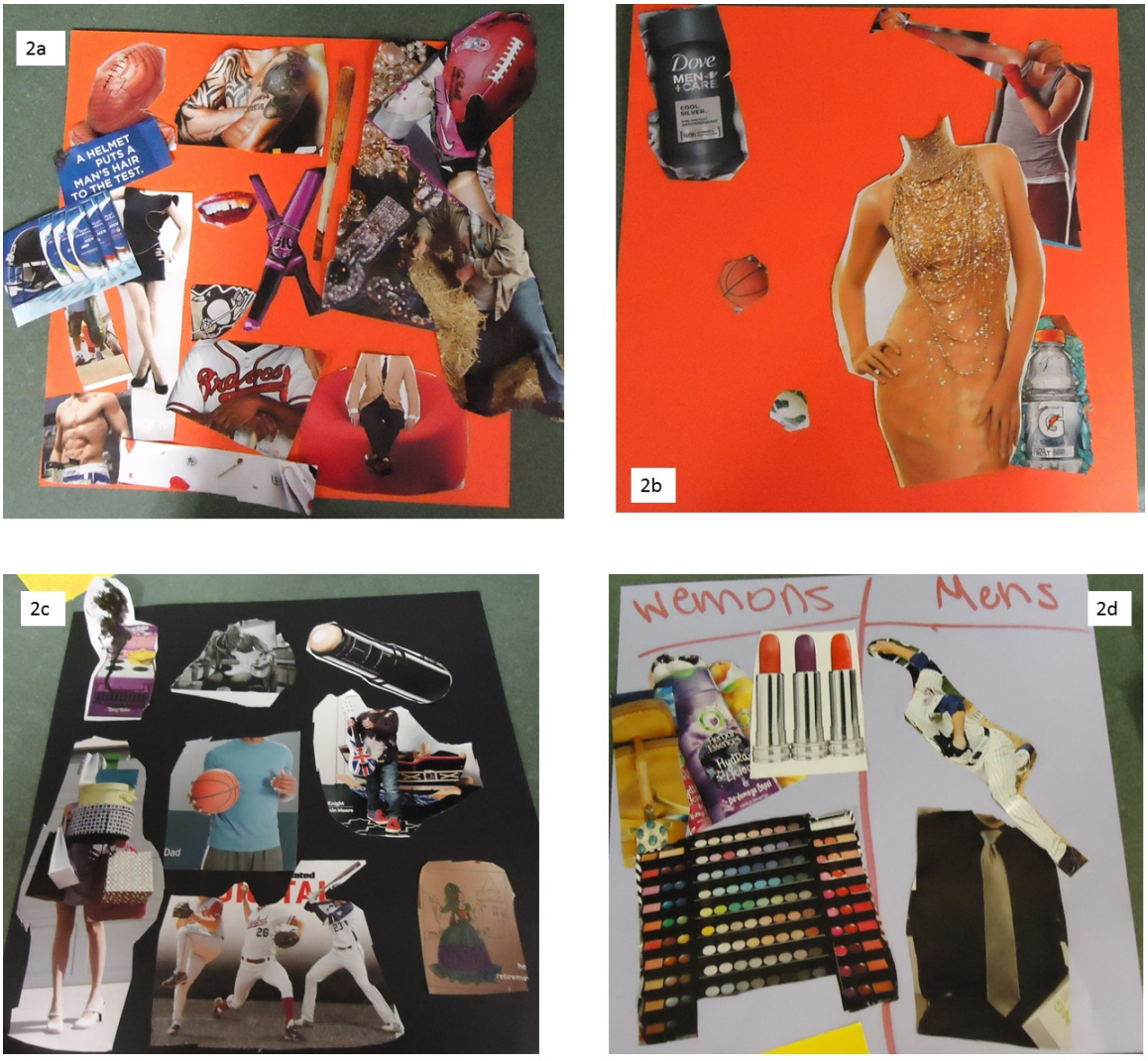
	# of collages including at least one image in this theme	Total # of images in this theme
Sports	19	56

Fashion / shopping	17	46
Gender words / gendered names	11	35
Animals	10	25
Other words	8	25
Food / cooking	11	22
Hygiene / makeup	12	22
Jewelry / accessories	10	22
Technology / media	10	14
Lips / eyes / hair	9	13
Flowers / candles / hearts / love	7	14
Cars / vehicles	7	9
Cartoon characters	6	8
Music	6	7
Home repair / homemaking	2	6
Logos / mascots / brands	4	5
Cigars/cigarettes / alcohol	3	5
Architecture / home fashions	3	4
Parenthood / family	3	3
Other vocation	2	2
Patriotism	1	1
Science	1	1
Guns/war	1	1
books	1	1
Toys	1	1
total		**348**

By far the most common class of images in the collages were sports-themed: Sports jerseys, bodies captured in the act of athletics, and sports equipment such as footballs, basketballs, and soccer balls. These images were predominantly used to speak about masculinity. Students included a total of 56 sports-themed images across their collages, and perhaps more importantly, 19 out of 23 of the finished collages included at least one sports-related image. Bodies in the act of doing sports were featured 35 times in the collages, and 24 of these were traditionally masculine bodies. Another 3 were traditionally feminine bodies, and nine were bodies of intedeterminate gender. Sports

images were far more commonly associated with masculinity than with femininity, as the representative examples below (Figure 12) illustrate.

Figure 12: Four collages representing the use of archetypes in gender collages.



In all four of the collages above, athletes are pictured in the act of doing their sport. Collage 2a was the most sports-heavy of all submitted collages, with 10 sports-themed images that included bodies, sports paraphernalia, and a logo for the Pittsburgh Penguins, a professional hockey team. One of the 10 images is overtly feminine: The image of a pink-clad arm behind a football in the upper right-hand corner of the collage.

This is juxtaposed with the heavily muscled, bare-torsoed bodies in the bottom left and top center, and the torso of a person clad in the jersey for the Atlanta Braves, a professional baseball team. Another image, that of the lower body and legs of a golfer, is not obviously feminine or masculine in its presentation; it is, however, juxtaposed against an image of overtly female-bodied lower torso and legs, clad in a black dress and heels. The golfer's body is positioned in a wide-legged, assertive stance; the feminine body is positioned with its legs crossed and one hip jutting in the familiar come-hither gesture that expresses sexuality and sensuality.

Collage 2b includes a similarly sexualized image of femininity: A female-bodied torso in a glittery gold cocktail dress, with a hand on one jutting hip. Behind this image is that of a female-bodied torso in a tank top and shorts, with boxing gloves, caught in the act of extending one arm in a jab. This boxing pose does not, however, communicate power or strength, as the arms are stretched but not taut and little momentum is visible behind the punch. The female boxer's body is not overly muscled, especially in comparison to the hypermuscular torsos of collage 2a; indeed, the boxer in collage 2b is quite similar in shape and muscularity to the woman in the glittery cocktail dress directly below her. In both images the arms are lightly muscled, bent across the body in an assertive but not overtly aggressive pose. Both images feature the curve of a hip to mark the body as female; in both images the skin is glowing but not gleaming with sweat. Never mind that one body is dressed for a cocktail party or awards ceremony, while the other is dressed for a workout; the bodies are in most important ways identical.

In collage 2c, two groups of masculine-bodied athletes are included in the center of the cardstock. The central image of this collage is of a body holding a basketball. This

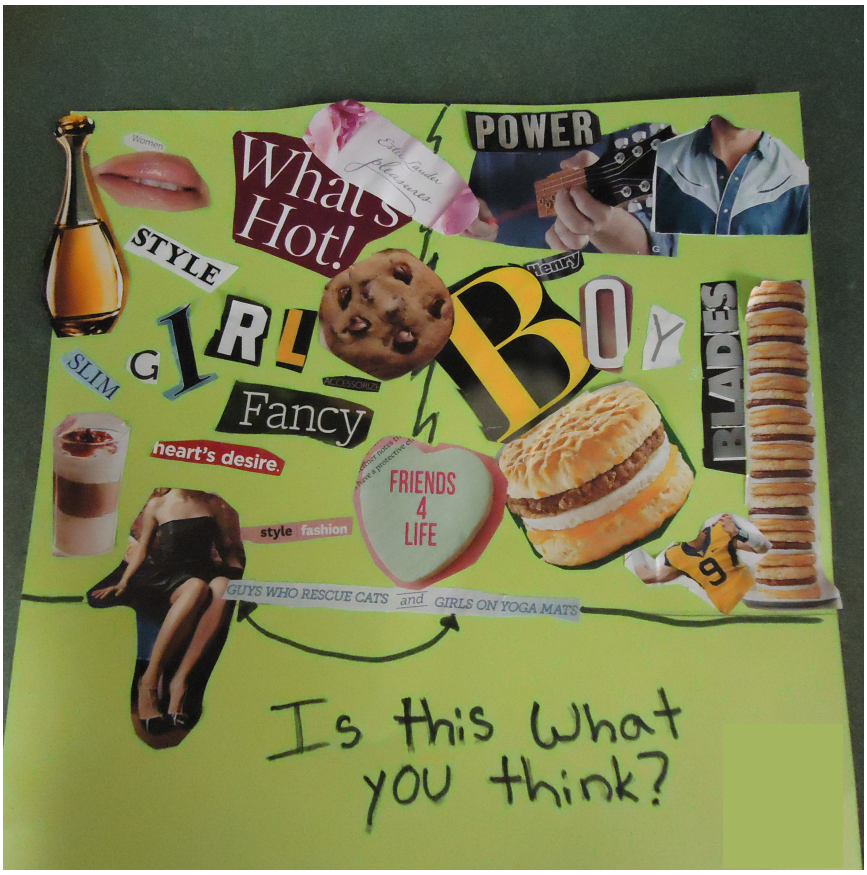
body is not overly muscled, but it is tagged male by the creator's decision to include the word "dad" just to the left of the image. Immediately to the left of this image is a pair of slim, feminine legs beneath a stack of bags and boxes that communicate a woman caught in the act of shopping. These legs are juxtaposed against three images of college baseball players, whose broad, powerful legs are caught in the act of doing their sport. Collage 2d includes only one sports-themed image: That of a male body playing baseball, directly under the heading "men" and directly above a torso dressed in a black shirt and tie. These two bodies are the sole representatives of masculinity in this collage. In contrast, the "women" side of collage 2d includes no bodies, including instead images of makeup, personal hygiene, and jewelry.

Certainly, the availability of issues of *Sports illustrated* during this activity made it more likely that collages would skew toward athletic representations—and that those representations would skew more toward masculinity, given the relative paucity of images of female athletes in its pages (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). Given the reliance in *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, and similar mass-market magazines on glamorous femininity, it also seems highly likely that these archetypes would also make their way into students' collages. However, these magazines always include less overtly archetypal images of masculinity and femininity, of women and men; these images are not as obvious, and not as common, and therefore require more time and care to locate, along with an interest in appropriating them.

Initially, as I will discuss further near later in this chapter, students did not seem attuned to alternative versions of gender—they seemed drawn most commonly the archetypes, and to use these archetypes to represent how they thought about gender

Reproducing or critiquing cultural norms? The patterns described above suggest an awareness of some of the dominant cultural discourses around gender. The "normals" approach is quite evident here, with masculinity and femininity being more or less firmly separated in many of the students' collages and masculinity represented as dominant, aggressive, and physical and femininity represented as passive and sexual. At least two interpretations of these collages are possible. First, it may be the case that students are expressing an awareness of cultural norms, without directly embracing those norms. Second, it may be the case that they are simply reflecting these norms without critique. Certainly it is difficult to make assumptions about intentions, without directly asking the creators of their collages to discuss what they intended to communicate. (In fact, we did precisely that later in the activity and I will discuss the outcome of that discussion later in this section.) However, there is no evidence in the collages I included above that the creators are engaging in critique. The absence of criticism of cultural norms is especially visible when these collages are compared to the small number of collages that expressly communicate criticism of gender norms. Those collages are discussed below.

Figure 13: Collage 3a.



With the phrase “Is this what you think?”, collage 3a (Figure 13)challenges the viewer to reconsider their beliefs about gender: This phrase is written in marker in the bottom third of the image, with a bidirectional arrow pointing to the words “guys” and “girls” in the phrase “guys who rescue cats and girls on yoga mats.” The phrase is taken from an advertisement for Silk almond milk (Figure 14).

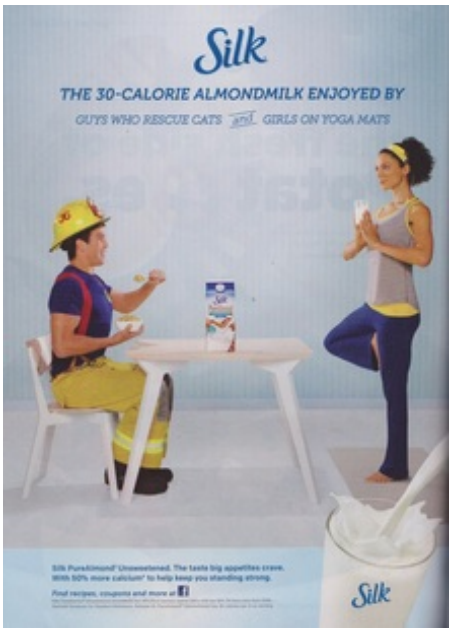


Figure 14: Advertisement for Silk almond milk, referenced in collage 3a (fig. 12 above).

This image indexes a dominant cultural view that health food products such as almond milk are the domain of "new age-y" and health-conscious women such as the woman standing in a yoga pose in the ad. The ad also targets men, including an image of a traditionally masculine, male-bodied person dressed as a firefighter. This particular firefighter is depicted as a cat rescuer, a common rescue trope in popular media. Firefighters are constantly coming to the rescue of women's cats, who are stuck in trees and cannot be rescued by their owners; rescue requires a man. The collage is challenging the viewer, then, to consider whether they accept this trope as a valid or true depiction of

gender roles; by extension, the viewer is also invited to consider where they stand with regard to the other images in the collage. Is femininity—and should it be—associated with beauty, slimness, and style? Is—and should—masculinity be associated with sports, hamburgers, and music?

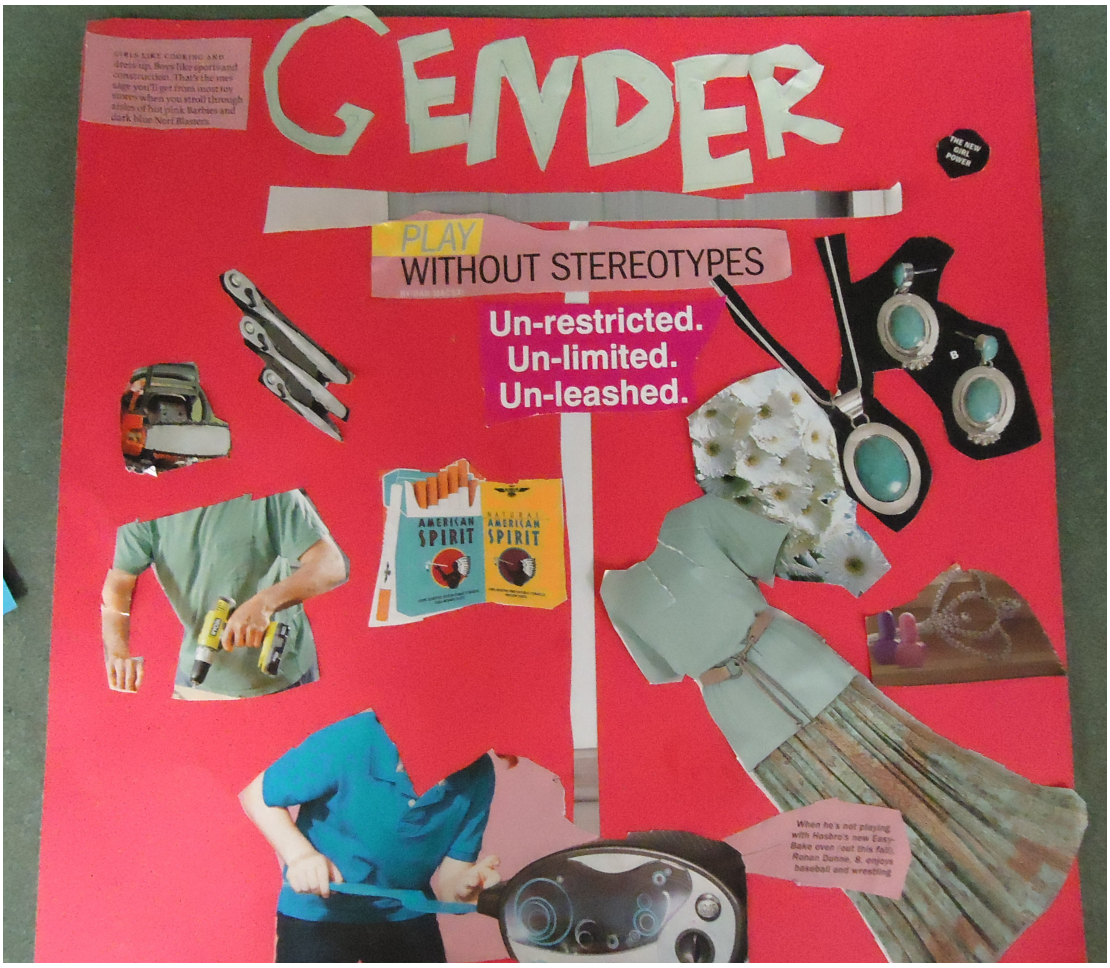


Figure 15: Collage 3b, "Gender--play without stereotypes."

Collage 3b (Figure 15) levels a similar challenge. This collage draws primarily from a *Time* magazine article describing efforts to challenge gender norms in children's toys, (http://ideas.time.com/2013/03/14/10-big-ideas/slide/play-without-stereotypes/), and it juxtaposes the gender-binary structure and images that align with gender stereotypes

with images that challenge these stereotypes. The text in the upper right-hand corner reads: “Girls like cooking and dress-up. Boys like sports and construction. That’s the message you’ll get from most toy stores when you stroll through aisles of hot pink Barbies and dark blue Nerf Blasters.” The text in the bottom right reads “When he’s not playing with Hasbro’s new Easy-Bake oven (out this fall), Ronan Dunne, 8, enjoys baseball and wrestling.” Ronan’s body has been included in this collage, as the child whose body violates the gender binary by crossing the gender line.

Chris, a male-assigned fifth grader who developed this collage with a partner, made it clear that the critique of gender norms was intentional. Before describing the collage to the class, he explained:

> So this sort of represents our version of gender except our version of gender is a lot different than other people’s because I think that gender is not really like, I think the word gender sort of means, it, the word gender is a stereotype. The word gender itself is a stereotype separating boys and girls. And that’s what I think gender is. I don’t think that it’s a good thing. I don’t think gender is a good thing. I think that it’s bad that we’re separating girls and boys and what they do.

Here, Chris is positioning his collage as different from the work of his classmates—he notes that contrary to what his classmates have stated about gender, *he* sees gender as a stereotype. He notes that he reject the binary system that leads to “separating boys and girls” and offers a collage that levels a direct critique of that binary.

Figure 16: Collage 3c, created by Laura.

Collage 3c (Figure 16) offers a complex, nuanced challenge to gender norms. When I first began working with this collage, I considered it to be a fairly typical representation of masculinity and femininity, with sports, fashion, and makeup communicating cultural norms about gender paired with a critique of these images in the phrases “Is it a boy or a girl?” and “he|r.” It took me several viewings to realize a crucial

detail: All but one of the bodies in this collage are lacking any secondary sex traits that mark them as male or female. The torso in the bottom left corner is marked by its breasts as female-bodied; the five additional bodies have no such clear indication. One might assume—as I initially did—that the body dressed in white in the upper left corner is a boy and the body dressed in white in the lower right corner is a girl, but the only evidence for this is that one body is wearing a dress and the other is wearing pants. The basketball player in the center of the collage does not carry the excessive muscularity commonly associated with male-bodied professional athletes, nor does it feature hips, breasts, or any other secondary sex traits associated with female-bodied people. The soccer player's legs and the horse jockey's arms could as easily be female as they could be male.

I am immersed in gender-focused research, have for years been trying to help students reject gender norms, yet when presented with a sex-neutral body in a dress I assumed it was female and when presented with a sex-neutral body in a basketball uniform I assumed it was male. These assumptions are precisely what this collage challenges.

The creators of the collages above—Kay and Emily (3a), Chris (3b), and Laura (3c)—represented exceptional cases throughout the trans*literacies unit. They were important participants in class discussion because they were regularly able to critique cultural messages about gender and their classmates' acceptance of these messages. Not all students began with such sophisticated views about gender, however; many were more closely aligned with the views represented by Andrew, a male-assigned fifth grader, as he described his collage (Figure 17). His collage and a transcript of his presentation of his work are discussed below.

"Is your collage representing others' thinking or your own?" The case of Andrew.

In comparison to the overt critiques of gender stereotypes evident in the three collages above, the remaining collages appear to be less overtly engaged in criticism of gender norms. Given the emphasis during the trans*literacies unit on critical engagement with gendered media messages, it was important during this first media analysis activity to establish how much and what kinds of critique were already in evidence. We did this in a whole-class discussion, which was framed around one driving question: "Is your collage representing others' thinking or your own?"

Figure 17: Andrew's collage, left, and the *Time Magazine* cover from which he appropriated the dominant images of male and female bodies (included in the top half of his collage).

When Elly solicited volunteers to present their work, Andrew was quick to raise his hand. His collage draws primarily from an issue of *Time Magazine* whose cover story is entitled, "The childfree life: When having it all means not having children." Andrew has flipped this message on its head, creating a collage that leans heavily on traditional

family roles as a key component of gender. He has removed the headline and the heads and replaced the message with the word "DAD," positioned to the left of the male torso. His collage also features two Prius automobiles. Both are sedans, and both are marketed toward families; indeed, Andrew has retained the text beneath one of the cars: "Prius family." Also featured in this collage are, on the left side below the headless male torso, a high-end Breitling for Bentley men's watch, which retails for $7,800 (http://www.breitlingforbentley.com/en/collection/bentley-b06/versions/); an apparently male body in a suit, and an apparently male body in a baseball uniform.

Compared to the seven objects on the left side of the collage, the right side is fairly sparse—it features only three objects, all of which are apparently female bodies. In addition to the woman in a swimsuit taken from the *Time* cover, the other images include a woman in a dress and a woman modeling designer clothes.

As Elly held Andrew's collage up for the class to see, he offered the description transcribed below:

> Andrew: So:: ther::e is a, (.) BOY side and a GIRL side? For the boy side I put like, um::, a, WATCH? And some, ca—because uh usually:, uh, men have watches? And um, (2.0) *((Elly says sh:: to other students who are talking*)) and like that kind of watch? And uh:, two, the cars? Cause um, like on (.) long long trips, men, uh, they, THEY usually are the driver.
>
> Elly: So is YOUR collage representing OTHERS' thinking or your own. About gender? Does this tell what YOU think about gender?
>
> Andrew: I don't really think, I don't really know. I think maybe mine.
>
> Elly: Yours?
>
> Andrew: Uh-huh. And um I also put like, uh DAD side? And um: tuxedo? For the girl side I put like an outlining of a GIRL? And then: I cut off the head (.) and left the body for: the girl, cause you can't do faces.

Andrew's collage, and his description of it, highlight some important assumptions about gender. For Andrew, gender is a binary, and it is linked to discrete heterosexual family roles. In his depiction, men are fathers, watch-wearers, and drivers—household authorities, timekeepers, and organizers of family movement. Fatherhood is central to Andrew's collage, since he has placed the word "Dad" in the top left-hand quadrant; the word is bordered by three masculine bodies—the aforementioned man's naked torso, stretched across a bed, the man in a business suit, and the man in a baseball uniform. These images suggest archetypal fatherhood roles: The father-as-sexual-partner, the father-as-breadwinner, and the father-as-athlete. These are three primary subject positions that are normalized through hegemonic masculinity (Barrett, 1996; R. Connell, 1996; Robert W Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005); they reflect and reproduce heteronormative, gender normative, and class normative values.

Hegemonic masculinity reinforces sexism, heterosexism, and cissexism (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Haak, 2014; Serano, 2009). It provides a backbone and a justification for real and symbolic violence to be done to women; this violence is evoked when Andrew, describing the "girl side" of his collage, details how he "cut off the head (.) and left the body for: the girl." Certainly it is the case that Andrew was following our instructions in removing the girls' heads; yet his description of *how* he followed those instructions carries an unmistakeable trace of violence. He also does not provide a comparable explanation for the headless masculine bodies included on the left side of his collage; instead of detailing how he dismembered the male bodies he focuses simply on explaining that he included a "tuxedo" (suit) on the "boy" side of the collage.

In Andrew's depiction of gender, men do things: They parent, they drive, they wear watches. Women, on the other hand, take a passenger seat: They are driven, they are cut apart, their headless bodies left in public view.

Andrew notes that he is not sure whether his collage reflects his own views or society's; his uncertainty suggests that he has perhaps never seriously interrogated his assumptions about gender. For any educator interested in teaching for transformation, it is crucial to identify where individuals stand regarding dominant cultural norms; that Andrew is not sure where the gap is between his beliefs and cultural discourses suggests change is possible.

Representing gender: making sense of contradictions

Although students demonstrated that they were quite capable of offering sophisticated representations of gender, they were constrained by the tools available to them for building their messages. As a result, the collages often offered contradictory messages. It was not always clear whether students were relying on or critiquing dominant cultural messages about gender; it was rare to find a collage that offered a coherent and clear representation of gender. Most students did not express views on gender that were as strongly aligned with stereotypical beliefs as Andrew's were. However, most collages *did* represent a binaristic view of gender, relying on curation of archetypal images and placing these images to carefully convey that gender consists of discrete categories. There was not sufficient time to enable all students to describe their collages to the class, so it is not reasonable to make claims about whether their work

represented their own beliefs or society's—but what *is* clear is that students at the outset of the trans*literacies intervention were very fluent in the language of the gender binary.

Pushing for a shift: The Media Analysis Activity

Throughout the unit, students were consistently asked to identify and critique their assumptions about gender and they were asked to identify and critique media messages about gender. At the beginning of the unit, students' views about gender reflected dominant cultural norms—perfectly natural, for children steeped in American culture. Initially, their representations of gender relied on these internalized and largely unquestioned assumptions; but by the end of the unit, after several weeks of engaging in sustained critique, new, more critical patterns emerged.

The trans*literacies intervention was designed in part to help students identify, critique, and challenge problematic messages about gender. One way that the unit accomplished this was through the media analysis activity that took place on days 10 and 11 of the intervention. In this activity, students completed a "history trace" of gender representations in commercials selling Legos, a building toy that was popular among many students during the time of my study. Although Legos are popular among children across gender categories, they are far more popular among male-assigned children than among female-assigned children (Ulaby, 2013). This may be due in large part to Legos' marketing strategy: Although the brand's earliest commercials targeted both boys and girls, Legos kits tend to skew toward traditionally masculine interests such as robots, spaceships, guns, and so on; and many of the kits align with media franchises—such as Minecraft and Star Wars—that are far more common among boys than among girls. In

2012, Legos released the widely critiqued—but ultimately very popular—Lego Friends series, kits that were intended to attract girls. With pastel bricks, pre-fabricated items such as hair salons and bakeries, and a design that makes Lego Friends bricks incompatible with other Legos kits, this sub-category has been widely criticized by feminists who argue that Lego Friends represent a "pastel-colored, gender-segregated, stereotypically female suburban paradise" (Sarkeesian, 2012).

The history trace of Legos commercials was intended to help students to identify and interrogate the gradual omission of girls from Lego's marketing campaign, paired with an increasing emphasis on traditionally masculine activities. In this sense, it is representative of a common trend in advertising directed toward children—print, television, and web-based advertising has become increasingly segregated by gender (Auster & Mansbach, 2012; Francis, 2010), reflecting a general trend toward segregating toys into "girls'" and "boys'" categories.

In the Lego universe, Legos were initially represented as having universal appeal across gender categories. Early Legos commercials showed children—boys and girls—building simple houses, animals, vehicles and cities; later commercials tended to omit girls entirely and showed boys creating complicated battle scenes or, more recently, working with their fathers on joint projects.

I hoped to help students identify two trends: First, the more obvious and overt gradual omission of girls from the Legos marketing campaign; and second, the increasing emphasis on stereotypically masculine activities.

This activity was designed to focus on the messages about masculinity that are communicated through the Legos commercials. This was the chosen focus for two

reasons: First, the stereotypes of femininity that are embodied in the Lego Friends kits are fairly overt and have been widely discussed in popular culture, and students in my study had already expressed an awareness of the problematic messages embedded in the Lego Friends kit. Second, although students were quite willing and eager to talk about problematic messages about femininity and inequalities for girls and women, they seemed less able to discuss cultural messages about masculinity and the norms for boyhood and manhood. Elly and I viewed this as an important issue to address with the students, in part because the majority of students in the class were male-assigned and in larger part because cultural messages about masculinity are an enormous piece of the gender puzzle.

Students' willingness to discuss sexism targeting girls and women and their reluctance to engage with the broader impact of sexism, binaristic gender norms, and misogyny was perfectly in line with dominant values surrounding gender and gender bias. Cultural conversations surrounding these issues tend toward asymmetry, with an emphasis on sexist social structures that impact women but little to no engagement with how these structures impact all people in subtle and overt ways.

It was easy for many students to identify how the Legos commercials—and Legos themselves—skewed over time away from girls; they were also able to identify some of the ways in which gender stereotypes were communicated through the commercials. After showing the class several commercials, Elly asked students to describe what they noticed about gender. Students offered the following observations:

> Nelly (female-assigned fourth grader): I noticed that the first two had a girl and boy playing legos but then gradually it became just boys.

> Zoey (female-assigned fifth grader): The first one is like, well, is like this one is for boys and this one is for girls.
>
> Thomas (male-assigned fourth grader): I noticed that most of the videos had only boys. And one of them had a girl.
>
> Emily (female-assigned fifth grader): In the videos there were some stereotypes about clothing, where like in the Zack one, he was wearing all of this heavy jacket and all of this and then the ones with the girls they were wearing you know, well, at least the one with the baby girl she was wearing a dress and pigtails instead of maybe jeans or whatever.
>
> Sylvie (female-assigned fifth grader): I've got a Lego set? um that I got, um, when I was like five or something like that and it was about a house that was pink. It was supposed to be built with pink color, and my brother got one that was like blue and, all these colors that boys like to wear.

In the observations transcribed above, students worked together to build a narrative about first, the exclusion of girls and second, the impact of this on both the messages that the commercials send about gender and their experiences playing with Legos. After Nelly, Zoey, and Thomas all identify an increasing lack of female representation in the commercials, Emily suggests that the problem extends beyond *whether* boys and girls are represented equally and includes *how* boys and girls are represented as well. She points to differences in clothing between Zack, the apparently white and middle-class boy who serves as a sort of Legos mascot throughout the 1990s, and the girls who are represented in the commercials. Sylvie draws a connection to her own life, describing a time when she and her brother received Lego kits that were color-coded according to traditional gender roles.

Students also identified problems in the kinds of projects represented in the commercials. First, they considered the father-son pairings of commercials problematic:

> Zane (male-assigned fifth grader): I noticed that like in the build together one it was a father and son? But it like could've been daughter and father, daughter and mother, and multi, and son and mother.

Additionally, they critiqued the projects that were associated with the boys in the commercials:

> Aidan: The set that they were building was had a one of the big, uh figures? And, um, but, but, that built by um and um, that could've been built by a girl? It doesn't have to be built by a male gender.

The observations transcribed above suggest students were willing and able to identify problematic aspects of gender representations—especially when those representations omitted girls or depicted girls in problematic ways. I wanted to push students, too, to consider how these messages impact them—how they have come to internalize some of the problematic messages about gender represented in these commercials. In particular, I wanted to encourage the students to expand their awareness of gender norms to also include a critical perspective on how masculinity is represented and how boys are taught to eschew traditionally feminine activities and products. Although students were willing to identify ways in which *children in general* might be influenced by the Legos commercials, they were not quite willing to agree that *they specifically* were impacted by these messages.

Although students were willing and able to identify a developing gulf between boys and girls in the Legos commercials, they were less willing to go along with the possibility that these messages impacted them. It required a strong push to help them to see that these media messages impacted their views on gender and gender-appropriate activity. I asked students whether they thought the father-son commercial might interest girls in playing with the products represented in the commercial; by and large, students said they thought girls would be interested in that commercial. When I asked them if boys

would be "sold" by the Lego Friends commercial, students said they did not think so. I asked them to explain why, and Chris, a male-assigned fifth grader, made the following argument—challenged by many male-assigned students in the class. He combines an argument that boys would generally be unwilling to play with Lego Friends with an argument that boys would not wear dresses to school:

> Chris: it's a strange thing is that, (0.6) um, with (0.6) style, is that, (0.6) um, girls (.) can (1.2) stereotypically it's fine for girls to wear (0.4) boys' style, (0.8) like, girls would be fine in jeans and what[[ever]], whatever is a boy's style, [[but]] (1.0) boys aren't (1.2) going to wear dresses to school. Or,
>
> Male student (MS)1: Why not?
>
> Chris: What?
>
> Male Student1: Unless they wore, unless they lived in Ireland—but those are kilts.
>
> Chris: Yeah. (1.2) But that's different. That's the Ireland style. In ((*every word is slightly emphasized, as if to underscore the point.*)) American style(.) boys aren't going to wear dresses to school.
>
> Elly: And Chris, what--why can't they? Or why don't they?
>
> Chris: I don't know. But,
>
> Male student 2: Why can't we?
>
> Male student 3: Yeah, why can't we?
>
> Chris: Boys aren't ((*gestures toward screen at the front of the room*)) going to play with that Lego set, ((*indicating the Lego Friends set*))
>
> Unidentified male student: I would.
>
> (3.0)
>
> Chris: Well, specifically what it is doing in that Lego set, I don't think,
>
> Unidentified male student: It depends who,
>
> (2.0)

> Chris: Yeah, it depends on the person, but (3.0) most, I'm not I'm not saying like, (0.4) [student] you're out of town::, nobody is with you, but most boys: are not going to play with that set. ((*male student says something, inaudible*)) Most, what?
>
> Elly: He just said he's not saying just,
>
> Chris: I'M NOT I'M NOT, (1.0) may—you probably disagree, but most boys don't. (1.0) Do specifically what they're doing in that set.

For Chris, there exists a connection between boys being averse to wearing dresses in public and boys being averse to playing with "girls'" toys. He may not be clear on the origins of these aversions, but a large body of research explains the origins for him: Children internalize, from a very young age, rules about gender-appropriate behavior. By the time they are Chris's age, these norms have been so fully assimilated that they feel more or less "natural" (Martin, 1998, 2005). Chris allows that there are exceptions to the general rule, but *most* male-assigned children have no interest in traditionally feminine toys. He is not certain why—indeed, he will indicate several more times before this intervention is over that he is unclear on the origins of gender norms—but he is certain they exist. He becomes increasingly insistent throughout the discussion transcribed above, when individual male-assigned students challenge him to explain his position. His point culminates in his forceful declaration that even if individual students in his class disagree with his assertion that boys won't play with Lego Friends, *most* male-assigned children do not—and would not choose to play with this particular kit.

Laura, a female-assigned fourth grader, serves as an ally for Chris, agreeing with him and pointing to the ways in which social norms are reinforced in local interactions. She focuses on the first half of Chris's point, the argument that boys will not wear traditionally feminine clothes to school.

Laura: Um, going back to the part where, (.) like, well--well, if (.) I tried to look like (.)any of the boys in this classroom, I couldn't really, like, make everyone think oh, you're obviously trying to look like a boy. But like since these days a lot of girls are like wearing jeans and, (.) sweatshirts.

Elly: Mm-hm.

Laura So but, so a girl couldn't really pull off completely trying to look like a boy? But a boy? If they came to school wearing a dress: and, (1.6) like, Several students talking over each other; audible phrases include "hair" and "and makeup"

Laura: I don't know, a dress, and (2.6) they would just, girl, everyone would just say oh, you're obviously trying to look like a, a girl.

Elly: And what would happen?

Well, I think--

Elly: What would happen at SJA? If someone did that.

Laura: At SJA probably people, (2.0) well, (0.6) I mean I think it would probably be a m—a mixed reaction of, oh that's so cool, you're defying stereotypes and other people would say that's really weird, I don't think I wanna (.) hang out with you, but I think people don't, boys (.) don't do that because they would be embarrassed. (1.6) They would be like, I'm wearing, because most girls, well, there's a stereotype that—stereotype that girls are supposed to be pretty and wear always pink and stuff

Elly: Mm-hm.

Laura: but (.) a boy would be really embarrassed if they wore that.

In the conversation transcribed above, Laura makes several important points: First, that people would assume that a male-assigned child in a dress is "trying to look like…a girl," and second, that a female-assigned child wearing traditionally masculine clothes would not be judged for doing so. According to Laura, a boy in a dress would be seen as a violation of gender norms: Boys are expected to embrace masculine wardrobe

choices, and it would be considered "weird" and embarrassing if a boy resisted this expectation.

Neither Laura nor Chris explain why boys are expected to adhere to the gender binary, especially when, as Laura points out, girls have more freedom to embrace traditionally masculine dress and behavior. Indeed, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the apparent relative freedom of girls to break gender stereotypes compared to the restrictions on boys was consistently perplexing and frustrating to students in my study. It is particularly confusing for this group, given their knowledge that girls and women have historically suffered from far more social restrictions than have boys and men. How, then, can it be the case that male-identified individuals are more restricted when it comes to gender performance than are female-identified individuals?

Califia (1997) offers an answer:

> It seems the world is still more titillated by a "man who wants to become a woman" than it is by "a woman who wants to become a man." The first is scandalous, the latter is taken for granted. This reflects the very different levels of privilege men and women have in our society. Of course women want to be men, the general attitude seems to be, and of course they can't. (p. 178)

When Chris argues that boys will not engage in certain activities commonly ascribed to femininity and Laura points out that girls have more freedom to engage in traditionally masculine activities and dress, they are demonstrating an awareness of the misogynistic assumptions articulated in the above excerpt from Califia's book on the politics of transgenderism. They are demonstrating an awareness that some forms of gender variance are heavily policed; they are policed by a culture that is invested in privileging masculinity, in maintaining its dominance at all costs. Even at the Social Justice

Academy, a school that prides itself on its commitment to antisexism and gender equality, boys have reason to be apprehensive about their clothing choices. They might receive approval from some progressive peers, but they might also lose friends and be targeted by bullies.

There was no glorious "a-ha" moment during this discussion when it appeared that students understood not only that a range of overt and subtle cultural messages about gender were being communicated to them through all avenues, but also that they had internalized and were reproducing many of these problematic messages. However, there was some evidence that some students had taken this issue to heart. Upon completion of the whole-class discussion about the Lego commercials, students completed media analysis worksheets in which they provided an analysis of one or more of the commercials. The following come from the worksheets:

> Laura and Zoe, in response to the question "How do you relate to this commercial?": I feel actually like if you really asked somebody they would say that boys do obey stereotypes. This has a boy stereotype and a lot of people do think that way even if they won't admit it.
>
> Sarah and Emily, in response to the question, "What cultural beliefs do you think have changed since this message was created?": Over the years there's been separation (*between boys and girls*).
>
> Joshua, writing in response to the questions: "What opinions about gender are being expressed in the commercials?": Dudes like public transportation and girls like to make things pretty and houses and stuff.

In addition to the focus on cultural messages about masculinity, this activity supported students in viewing the notion of gender itself as not a stable, natural category but one that has changed over time. This emphasis on gender as a socially constructed and shifting concept was intended to challenge the dominant view of gender as "natural,"

"innate," and "inborn." Whatever view they held about gender, gender identity, and gender expression by the end of the unit, it needed to be inflected with the knowledge that whatever role gender plays in today's society, it has not always been this way and does not always need to be this way. In the media analysis activity described above, students began to exhibit a shift away from the reliance on stereotypes and archetypes that prevailed in the gender collage activity. This shift prepared them for the final critical media creation activity, in which they envisioned the future of gender. This activity will be described at length in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

Envisioning the future of gender

In chapter 4 I described two media-focused activities designed to push students to consider the messages about gender that surround them and why those messages might be problematic. Those activities each emphasized either creative or critical engagement with media messages, although clearly it would be impossible to separate the two completely. The final project of the trans*literacies intervention integrated critical *and* creative engagement with media messages. In the "gender in the future" project, students worked individually or, if they chose, with a partner of their choice to develop posters that identified some gendered aspect of their world today and imagined how things would change by the year 2125.

This was the final project of the trans*literacies unit, and students spent four class sessions working on their posters. For many students, this was not sufficient time; several students stayed in at lunch or worked on their projects before school.

Students submitted a total of 26 completed, on-topic collages; 19 were pair-generated projects and the remaining eight were completed by students working alone. (One student, who has a documented cognitive delay, was given the option to create a collage on a different topic; and six students did not complete their project within the time frame of the trans*literacies unit.) Twenty-four collages were created with drawings on poster paper, card stock, or cardboard; one pair of students chose to design their projects using digital technologies, and one pair designed a board game, called "Gender in the Future."

In analyzing student work, I focused on the following questions:

- Does this project critique dominant, binaristic views of gender?
- What role does gender play in this collage?
- What changes are anticipated in this collage, and on what grounds?

In analyzing students' final projects, I found four general trends across their work. These trends were:

1. Continued embrace of dominant cultural views of gender
2. Critique of the gender binary
3. Presentation of gender as a side issue, now and even more in the future.
4. Argument that although gender roles will change, stereotypes will remain.

These trends are described in more detail below, with examples illustrating students' general patterns in approaching these trends. Each trend will be discussed across several projects, along with one mini-case study to illustrate the trend.

Pattern 1—Continued embrace of dominant cultural views of gender (with mini-case study: Andrew, Continued)

Eight projects suggested an embrace of dominant cultural views of gender—even though the trans*literacies intervention aimed at demonstrating that these views are inaccurate and problematic. In general, these projects tended to either describe gender in contemporary culture using "normals" language or present a gendered future that continutes to align with the binaristic, "normals" view. When these representations were not paired with a critique, I placed them in this category.

Andrew, the male-assigned fourth grader who drew on misogynistic discourses to create and describe his gender collage early in the trans*literacies intervention, worked with a partner to create a poster that represents gender in his community (Figure 18). The

poster, included below, represents a view of gender in contemporary culture that would likely feel outdated to many residents of his community.

Figure 18: Andrew's final project, completed with a partner. The caption on the left reads: "Right now teenage girls are always on their phones. On the other hand boys are athletic. Also most men are at work while most women are at home and rest in the house. Hopefully everyone will athlete and have working." The drawing on the right represents the year 2125 and includes this description:" In the future girls and boys will workout. And girls will drive cars. And girls will work. And boys will not work."

This project represents a clear embrace of the gender binary—as well as an embrace of deeply problematic beliefs about gender and gender roles. A cluster of stereotypes about boys and girls are represented not as inaccurate representations that merit critique but as simple fact. Today, according to this poster, boys can be viewed as

physically superior to girls, who instead of being athletic spend all of their time talking to people on the phone. The 2014 poster depicts a world in which women not only do not work *outside* of the home but also do not work *inside* the home either—they simply "rest in the house."

This collage reflects the beliefs that were embedded in Andrew's initial collage—a view of men as authorities, as breadwinners, as physically powerful, and women as lazy, passive, and weaker than men. Much of the future envisioned in this project—one in which girls are not only athletic but also drivers—has in fact already come to pass. The rest of this future involves a reverse of the binary: Girls will become breadwinners and boys will not work.

There is little more to say about this project, other than that it was deeply disappointing to receive it. Certainly there is overwhelming evidence that a twenty-hour intervention—even one as thoughtfully and tightly designed as the trans*literacies intervention was—is insufficient to undo years of cultural messages about gender. It would be silly and hubristic to expect dramatic change in all students. However, I was dismayed to see that Andrew's beliefs about gender were so persistent, despite overwhelming evidence that his beliefs were inaccurate. During school hours Andrew was surrounded by women who work: One of his two teachers was female-identified, as were the school's principal, curriculum director, and art teacher—all people with whom Andrew came into direct contact on a nearly daily basis. Many of his female-assigned classmates were extremely athletic, participating in sports outside of school, and as far as I was aware none of them indicated an aversion to exploring career options once they became adults. Furthermore, both Elly and Rick spent significant energy ensuring

students were exposed to examples of people, male and female, who challenged gender stereotypes. Prior to the trans*literacies intervention, students had read about the experiences of Malala Yousafzai, a teenaged Pakistani girl who was the victim of an assassination attempt for her activism in support of education for girls in her home country. In the midst of the intervention, students spent Martin Luther King, Jr., Day learning about King's nonviolent approach to working for civil rights for Black Americans. Andrew's work represents, perhaps, a glimpse into the ways in which the "normals" approach to gender requires people to ignore contradicting evidence. It also represents the persistence and power of the "normals" approach.

Andrew's collage was an extreme example, but a few other students submitted projects that seemed to represent an embrace of binaristic and essentializing views of gender. Two female-assigned students, for example, submitted a project focusing on gender and fashion:

Figure 19: Final project created by two female-assigned students.

These posters appear to be focusing on high fashion—certainly the style items identified in the 2014 poster were not in evidence on the bodies of the students in the 4/5 classroom. However, excepting the shifts in the design of the clothes represented in the "future fashion" poster, it could easily be representing today's binaristic fashion trends. In 2125, women's fashion will continue to emphasize dresses, leggings, and high heels—fashion for people who have no reason to move around very much or very well. Men's fashion will continue to emphasize suits and athleticism—exemplified in the poster by the spring-loaded boots.

No critique of the gender binary or the differences in design or function of women's and men's fashion is in evidence here; in fact, the two posters seem to suggest

an increased emphasis on the gender binary, with no accompanying reflection on how or why this emphasis is likely to occur or whether it is a problem.

Pattern 2: Critiquing and erasing the gender binary (with mini-case study: Joshua and Aidan)

Twelve out of 26 final projects focused on critiquing current assumptions about gender and envisioning a world in which the problematic aspects of gender norms had shifted. One way in which students approached this critique was by directly challenging the gender binary and arguing that it can and will fade away over time.

Joshua, a male-assigned fifth grader, worked with Aidan, a male-assigned fourth grader, on a project in which gender distinctions become so minimal by the year 2125 as to be nearly impossible to perceive.

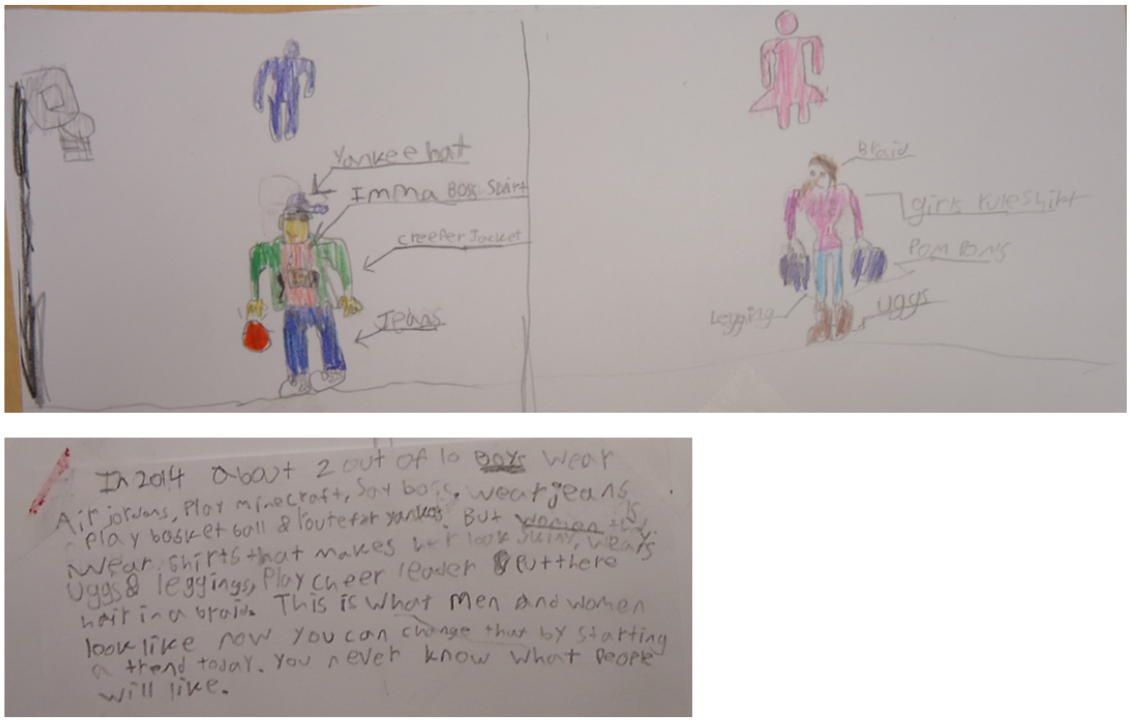
In the 2014 poster (Figure 20), Joshua and Aidan are careful to offer qualified generalizations about gender, or at least about boys:

> In 2014 about 2 out of 10 boys wear Air Jordans, play Minecraft, say boss, wear jeans, play basketball, and route for Yankees. But women they wear shirts that makes her look skinny, wear Uggs & leggings, play cheerleader and put their hair in a braid. This is what men and women look like now you can change that by starting a trend today. You never know what people will like.

The use of that phrase "about 2 out of 10 boys" is intriguing for at least two reasons. First, it suggests that their representation of boys is not a representation of how *most* boys dress or how they behave; yet despite this, they still felt it an appropriate image to represent the current state of gender. Second, there is no accompanying disclaimer on the description of women. It is possible that they felt more comfortable

qualifying stereotypes of boys, since they themselves identified as boys; and perhaps they were less certain of the stereotypes of girls.

Figure 20: Gender in 2014, created by Joshua and Aidan.



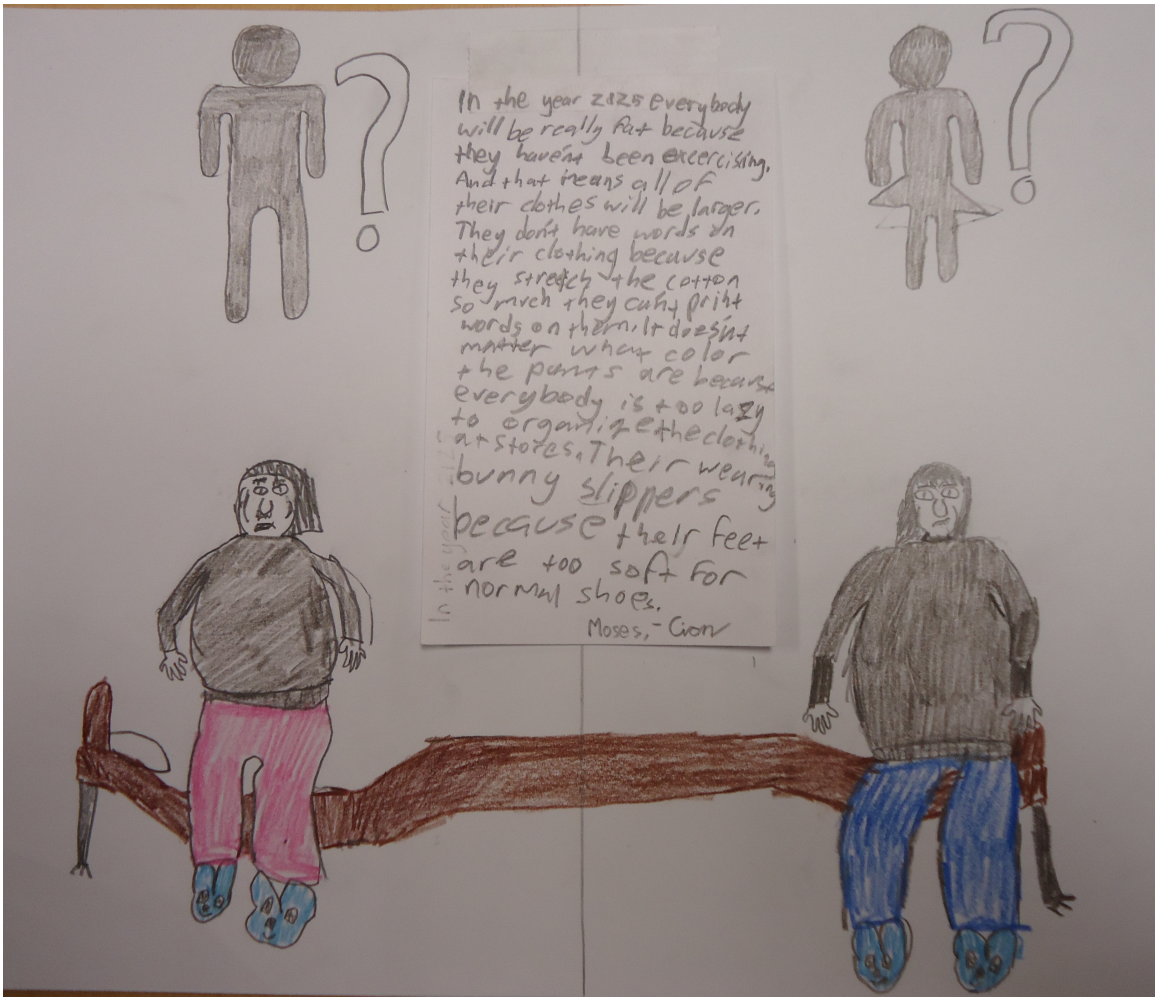
I asked Joshua and Aidan to explain their poster: Did they think *all* women fit the description they included in their 2014 poster? They gave me this answer:

> Joshua: I've also been thinking about the stereotypes, like how we think, um, oh, if you're a girl you might like cheerleading. That would be annoying, but like, a lot of girls DO like cheerleading. So, um, there was like, in [a local afterschool program] I was in gym once and we were playing basketball and the girls were like no we don't wanna do that. And so we played basketball and they started, and they were cheerleading. And a few girls joined in. I mean a stereotype isn't always, like, a stereotype is probably only bad if it's very very big generalized, like, oh, all girls, like if you're a girl, you have to like cheerleading. That's one of the bad stereotypes.
>
> Aidan: Um girls, um, girls can do cheerleading, and then boys can do, um, can do basketball or whatever. Instead of saying girls you HAVE to do cheerleading because you like this and boys you HAVE to do basketball because you like this.

Today, according to Joshua and Aidan, there exist stereotypes that pressure people to behave in certain ways—or to resist their preferences. Joshua and Aidan are critical of discourses around stereotypes, arguing that stereotypes are *generally* linked to trends in gendered behavior and that it is not necessarily bad for a person to behave in a stereotypical way as long as they do not feel as if they *must* behave that way.

Joshua and Aidan pair this critique with a future in which stereotypes disappear—because physical, gender-based differences have faded away (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Gender in 2125, created by Joshua and Aidan.



The caption in the center of this poster reads:

> In the year 2125 everybody will be really fat because they haven't been exercising. And that means all of their clothes will be larger. They don't have words on their clothing because they stretch the caption so much they can't print words on them. It doesn't matter what color the pants are because everybody is too lazy to organize the clothing stores. Their (sic) wearing bunny slippers because their feet are too soft for normal shoes.

Joshua and Aidan's version of gender in 2125 shows two people who look nearly identical, except that one person is wearing pink pants and another is wearing blue pants. On the day Aidan and Joshua designed this piece of their poster, Aidan rushed up to me to show me what he had drawn and asked me if I could tell which person was the man and which was the woman. I allowed that I could not tell the difference, and he pointed to a spot just below the nose of the person wearing pink pants.

"See that little mustache?" Aidan said, smiling broadly. "That's the only way you can tell he's the guy."

For Aidan and Joshua, secondary sex traits such as facial hair will not disappear in 111 years, but these traits will be minimized by the physiological sameness of men and women. (Note that, as was common in the gender collage activity, men in this collage do still enjoy the privileged left-hand position in their future.)

Many student projects embraced a similar belief. Molly and Zoey, in their vision of shifts in fashion trends, wrote the following descriptions of how and why stereotypes are going to change (Figure 22, Figure 23). They argue that today's strict divide in "girls'" and "boys'" clothes will be largely erased—that some differences in clothing choices will continue to exist, but most clothes, colors, and accessories will be marketed to both girls and boys.

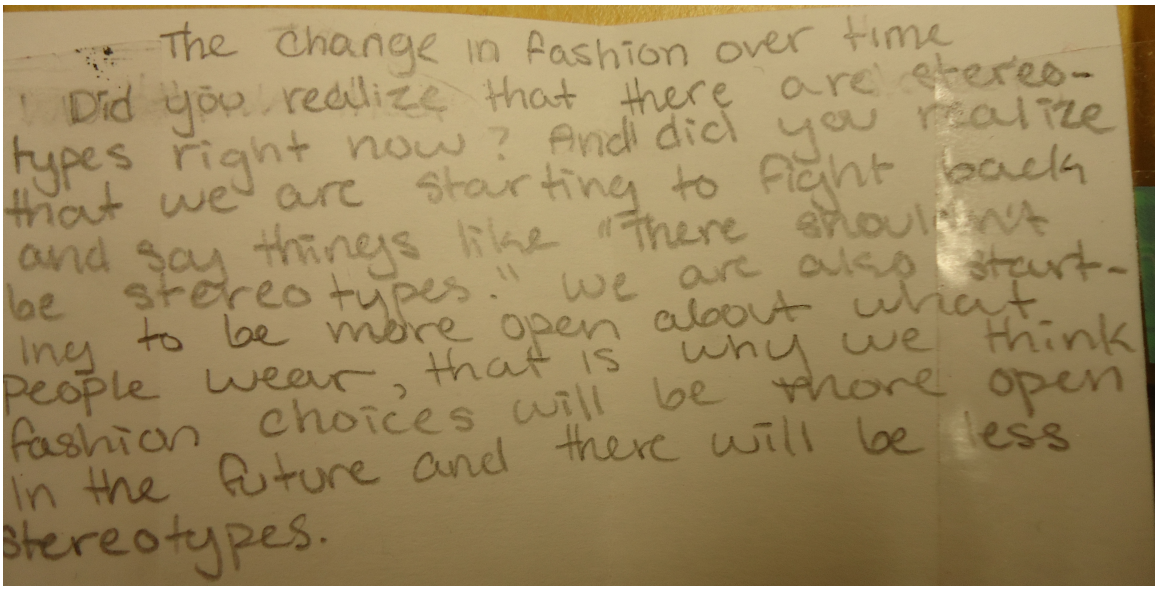


Figure 22: Description by Molly and Zoey of gender stereotypes in fashion.

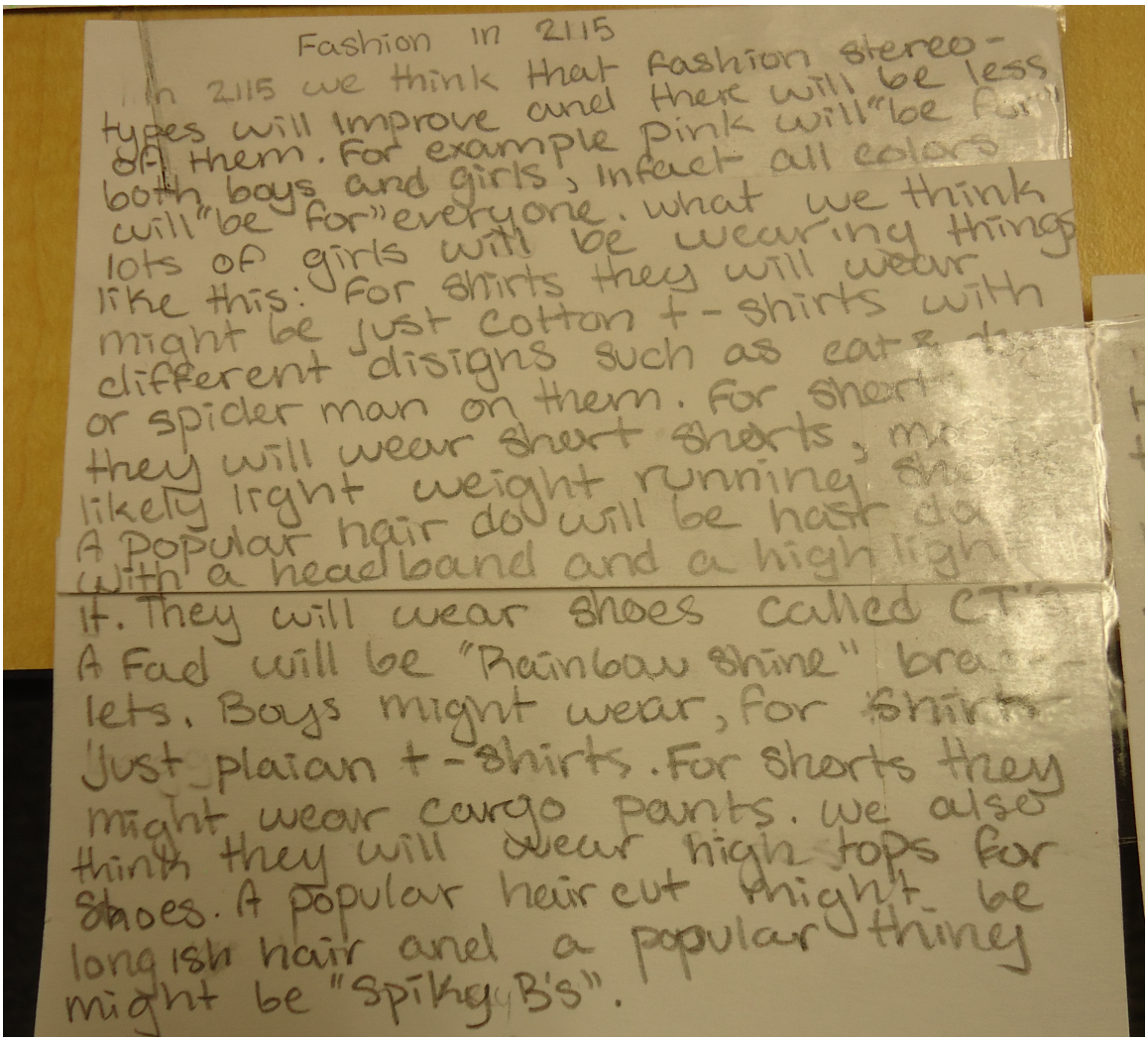


Figure 23: Description by Molly and Zoey of gender and fashion in 2115.

In the sports-themed poster (Figure 24), two male-assigned students critiqued the current practice of prohibiting girls from playing football and envision a world in which boys and girls play football together. It will, they explain, be awesome.

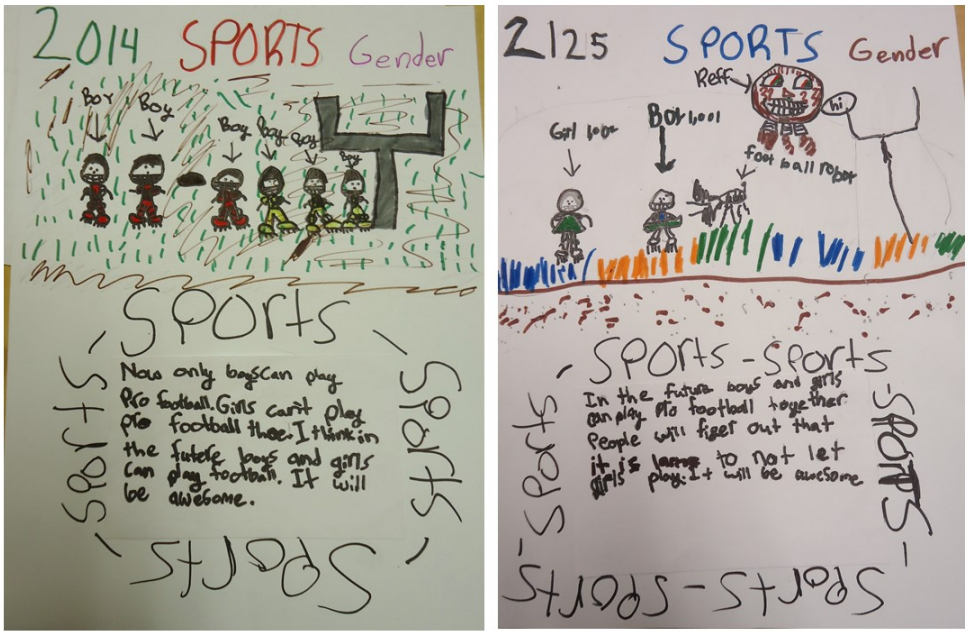


Figure 24: The caption on the left reads "Now only boys can play pro football. Girls can't play pro football though. I think in the future boys and girls can play football. It will be awesome." The caption on the right reads, "In the future boys and girls can play pro football together. People will figure out that it is lame to not let girls play. It will be awesome."

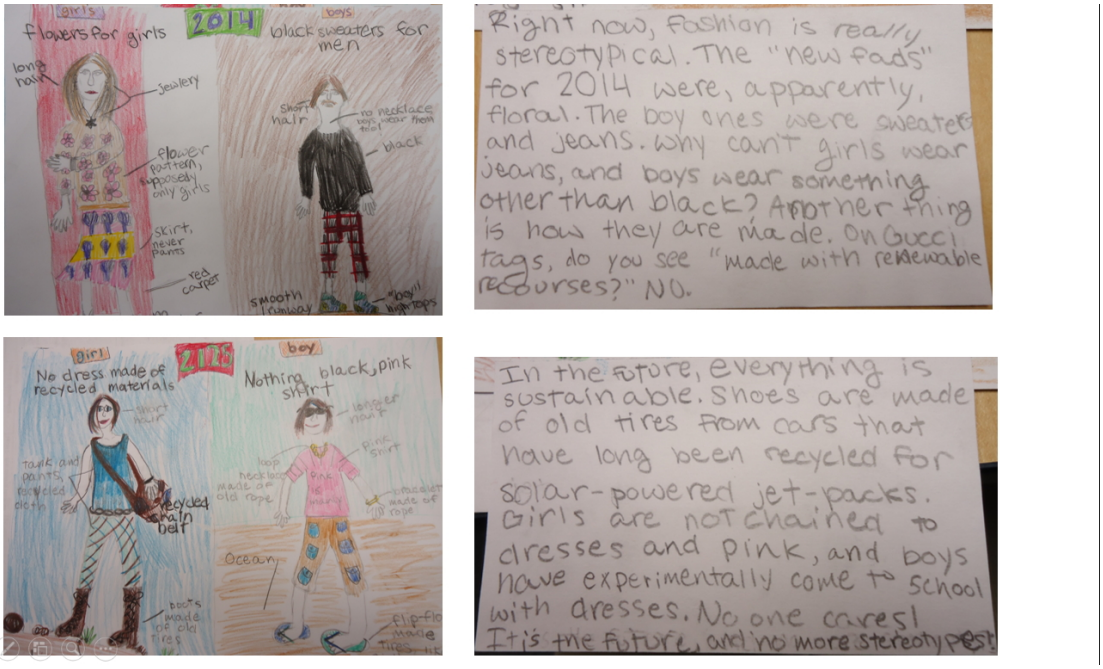
Many collages paired a similarly critical perspective on one aspect of contemporary gender norms with optimism for the future. Although it was not always evident that students had considered what would be necessary in order for their desired change to happen, they did exhibit a general consensus that problematic social constructions surrounding gender would disappear and that it would be *awesome* when this happened.

Pattern 3: Reducing gender stereotypes, and sidelining gender (with mini-case study: Kay)

In six posters, gender becomes sidelined by what students frame as bigger and more important cultural shifts. These shifts included environmental issues and the emergence of new technologies that will change the way people live. Kay, for example,

notes that fashion trends will change and the line between "girls'" and "boys'" fashion will become blurred, with colors and styles being adopted across the gender line (Figure 25). A bigger issue for Kay, however, is the impact of climate change on fashion.

Figure 25: Kay's poster on fashion in 2014 and 2125.



For Kay, fashion will continue to be marketed as a binary—although the norms will change. The girl of the future will wear "no dress" and this "no dress" will be "made of recycled materials." The traditional alignment of black with masculinity will have disappeared—the boy of 2125 will not only wear pink (a "manly" color in the future, according to Kay) but will also wear "no black." Importantly, Kay has dedicated space in her collages to discuss the surroundings of her fashion models. In 2014, fashionable women are photographed walking down red carpets—as pop culture celebrities—whereas fashionable men walk the runways, presumably as fashion models. In the future, however, these artificial environments have given way to natural surroundings. This is important,

and crucial to understanding the cause of the shift: Environmental degradation leading to a complete change in what people wear and why.

For Kay, the power of gender has been subsumed by a more pressing issue—a need to live sustainably. The issue of environmental sustainability and environmental justice are linked to the core commitments of the Social Justice Academy, and are addressed regularly across the curriculum. That Kay highlights environmental concerns in her gender-themed poster suggests that she sees it as a more powerful social issue shaping human activity—that the impact of gender will become sufficiently minor that it will be overtaken by other social problems.

The other collages that foregrounded social issues other than gender centered around technology. Two collages highlighted changes in the experience of watching television, focusing on more equitable representation of genders as only one of several kinds of shifts (others included integrating smells into television shows and injecting television signals directly into the brain). One collage described shifts in toys over time and emphasized that in the future toys would be marketed to children across the gender line, but the majority of the poster described new features of the toys instead of on how it would be designed to be appealing to multiple genders.

Other collages that backgrounded gender to other social concerns included two posters describing a range of changes to the experience of watching television, only one of which was a more equitable representation of genders (others included the injection of television signals directly into the brain and increased customizability of televisions); two pairs who focused on how robots or other forms of technology would change everyday life in a variety of ways, including in how we enact gender roles; one that invented a new

video game console and mentioned only briefly in the written description that this console would be more appealing to players regardless of their gender; and one that focused on children's recess activities and emphasized a move toward increased kindness in many ways, including in how children treat people across the gender line.

Pattern 4: Gender has changed, but stereotypes remain (with mini-case study: Chris)

Chris, the male-assigned fifth grader who in an earlier chapter was described as challenging his classmates to think about how media messages impact their behaviors, worked with a partner to develop a project focusing on one popular culture artifact: The Super Mario Bros. video game franchise (Figure 26, Figure 27, Figure 28). Chris's partner emphasized to me several times that he had had very little to do with the design and execution of the poster and that Chris was responsible for the majority of the message. In watching them work on the project, I came to agree with Chris's partner, who appeared to be responsible solely for drawing accurate copies of the characters from the video game; Chris even took responsibility for coloring the characters. I therefore chose to treat this project as a representation primarily of Chris's view of gender.

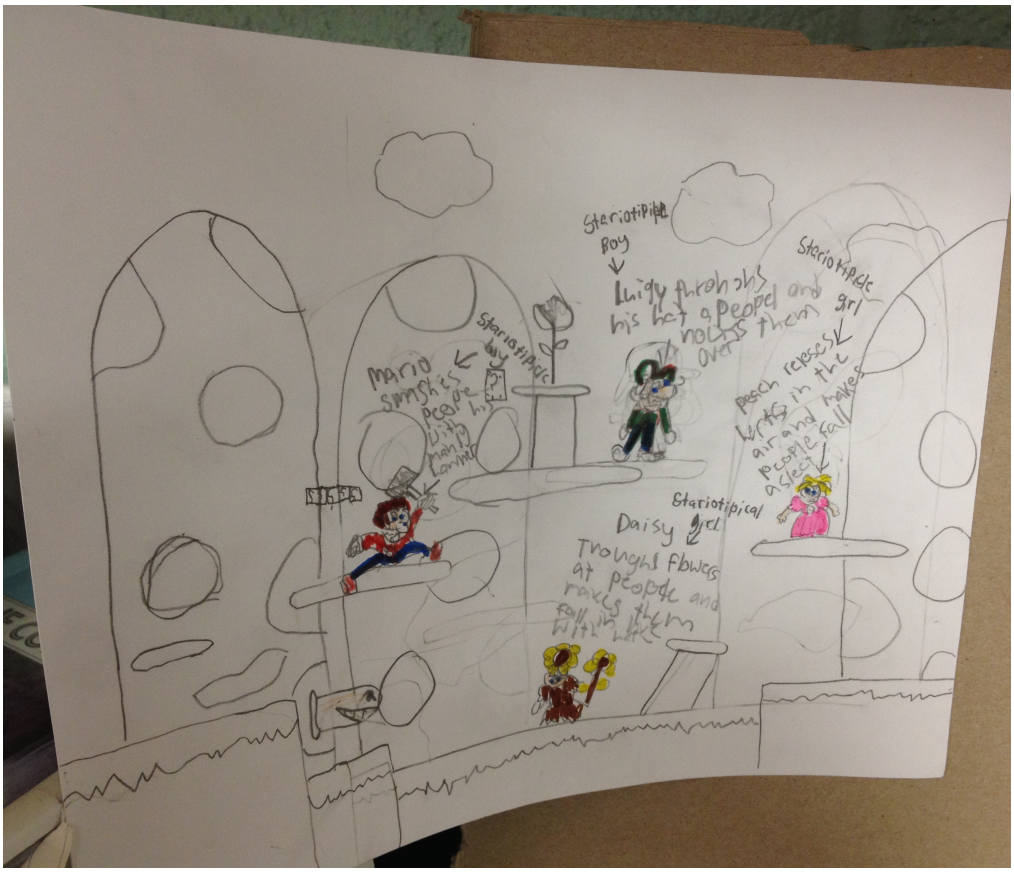


Figure 26: Characters in the Super Mario Bros. franchise today, as depicted by Chris and a partner.

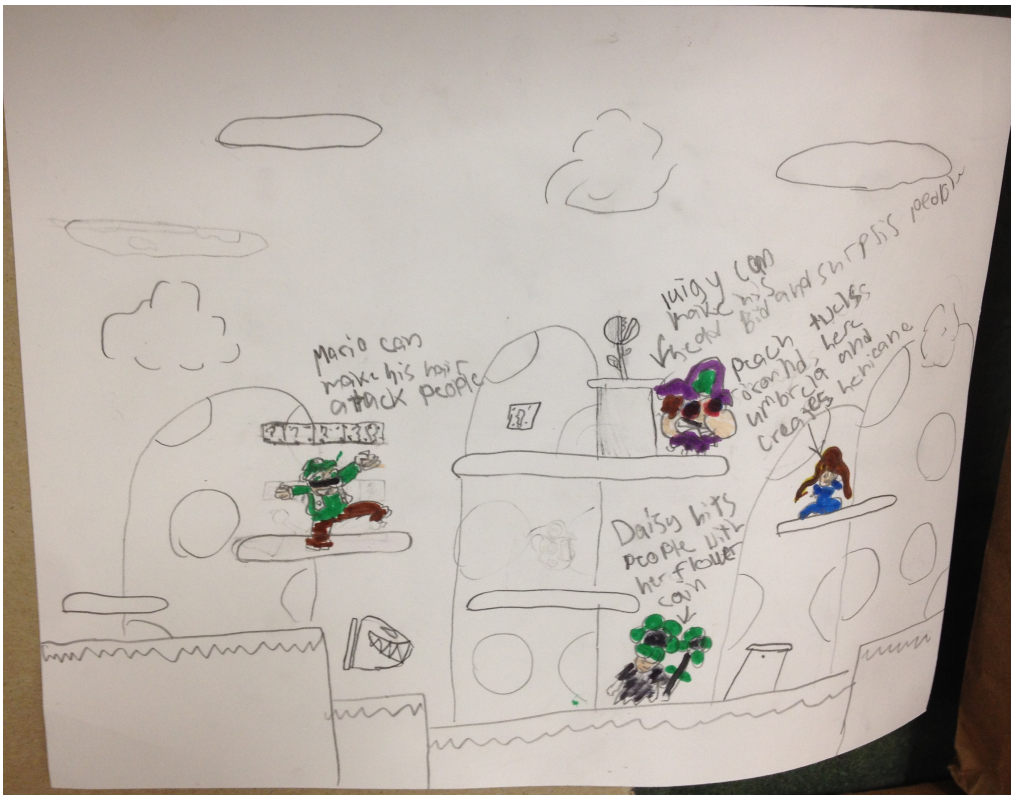


Figure 27: The future of Super Mario Bros. characters, as envisioned by Chris and a partner.

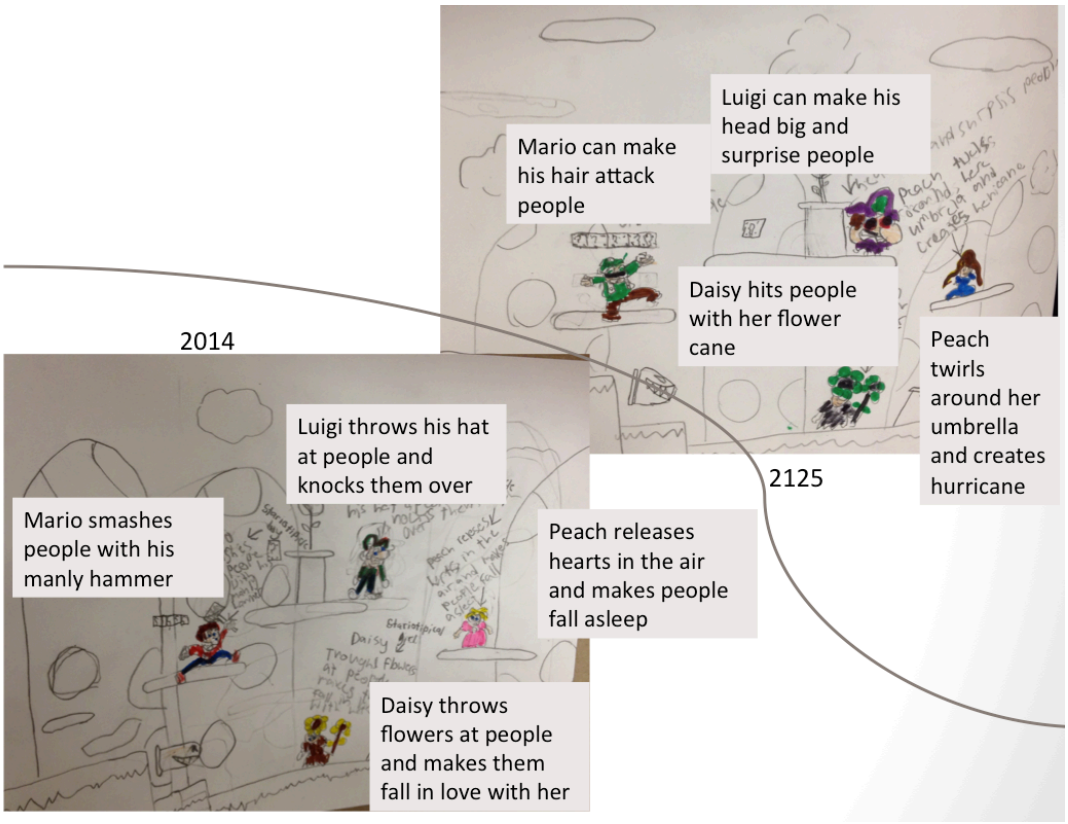


Figure 28: Both Super Mario Bros. posters, captioned.

The Super Mario Bros. project, pictured above, demonstrates an awareness of how the franchise enforces both aggressive masculinity and passive femininity. Mario and Luigi engage in the "manly" art of knocking people down, while Daisy and Peach, the female characters, use flowers and beauty and romance to defend themselves against bad guys. Color use in the 2014 poster is minimal but reflects, more or less accurately, the ways in which the characters are depicted in today's version of the game: Mario and Luigi are decorated in bright, traditionally masculine colors while Peach and Daisy are colored in pastels and yellows.

The 2125 poster is notable for its parallel imagery: The scene is the same; only the colors and character traits have changed. In the future, Mario will use his hair in an offensive maneuver; Luigi's head grows and he surprises bad guys, presumably stunning them into inaction. Daisy's ability to throw flowers in an act of self-cupidity has morphed by 2125 into a flower cane: Not only is she now an aggressor but she is also no longer young and therefore no longer an object of sexual desire. Peach is perhaps the most effective aggressor of all: She can whip up hurricanes to send villains flying off into space.

The color scheme of the 2125 poster has shifted, as well. In the future, no characters will be accessorized in pastels. Mario and Daisy will share a color—green—and Peach is dressed in bright blue.

It may appear that this project represents a progress narrative surrounding gender—female characters gain power and authority in the Mario Bros. franchise, and male characters become less aggressive. Chris and his partner, however, have taken care to emphasize that what looks like progress may not be quite so positive. In a written piece that accompanies the posters, viewers are told that the characters represent stereotypes:

"The characters are wearing different colors and the hair is different lengths. Those are still stereotypical styles based on gender in the future."

Whatever progress in gender politics this poster seems to indicate, its makers have indicated that it is still less progress than we would like.

Constraints and contradictions: Representing and envisioning gender

Social constructions of gender and gender norms are complex, often nuanced, and generally enmeshed across many intricate and interwoven social structures. For their final projects, students were asked to envision how gender norms will change in the next century but were asked to do so within some challenging constraints. Student representations of gender relied on their ability to draw their ideas—meaning they were required to focus on concrete, image-heavy concepts. This likely explains why so many final projects focused on fashion and technologies—two domains that not only lend themselves well to visual representation but also fall within the drawing skills of the typical nine- to eleven-year-old child.

The tools available to students for completing this project proved lacking in their ability to fully represent students' ideas. For example, Joshua and Aidan's poster representing current gendered fashion choices offered stereotypical depictions of what boys and girls wear today—depictions that, as they pointed out in the accompanying text and in their subsequent discussion with me, do not represent what all or even what most children choose to wear. This nuance is lost in the drawings, and this point emerged only when text and dialogue were built into the activity. As in previous activities in this unit, the constraints were intended to highlight a key contradiction: The tools we have available for representing gender norms fail to help us represent to the world what we know about these norms.

Talking about gender norms is difficult, and words and images fail to fully capture what we understand. The gap between what students knew about gender and their success in representing what they knew to their classmates was a source of regular

frustration for many, and a crucial point that cannot be overstated. Gender norms pervade our lives. Language falls short in representing how these norms shape our worlds, and all we can do is strive to come as close as we can to articulating our experiences. Failure to fully represent our views on complex social structures is constant and common. Experiencing this failure was as crucial to the trans*literacies unit as was developing new strategies for representing their experiences with and awareness of gendered cultural messages.

What did they learn? Shifts from pre- to post-assessment

Over the course of the trans*literacies unit, students in my study demonstrated a shift in patterns in representing gender. Initially, their depictions tended to draw on binaristic views of gender and archetypes and stereotypes about boys and girls, men and women. These representations seemed generally to reflect dominant cultural beliefs without questioning or challenging them. Later in the unit, students were more willing to address binaristic assumptions of gender more directly, demonstrating an increased awareness of how dominant assumptions about gender limits opportunities, shapes our behaviors, and guides our preferences.

These shifts in patterns of representation were accompanied by a shift in how students theorized gender equality. In the pre- and post-assessment worksheets I administered at the beginning and conclusion of the trans*literacies unit, I included several questions designed to elicit their views on equality and injustice across gender categories. :

1. Do you think boys and girls are equal?

2. Do you think there are differences in how boys and girls think? Why or why not? What examples can you give?
3. Do you think boys and girls are equal?
4. What privileges do boys have that girls don't have? What privileges do girls have that boys don't have?
5. Do you think parents and teachers treat boys and girls equally? Why or why not?
6. Do most boys and girls have to follow the same rules at home or not? Are chores the same?
7. Are there any unwritten "rules" for boys and girls?

Based on students' responses across these questions, I clustered student opinions regarding cross-gender equality in one of five categories, described in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Tagging approach for student responses to pre- and post-assessment questions

category	***description***	***example***
equal	Identifying no concrete differences between how boys and girls are treated or experience the world	Ans. to Q3: Yes because boys and girls are both human, their both people, and they both have brains. Ans to Q7: No because boys and girls can do things that the opposite gender usually does. (Responses suggest that there is no difference between boys and girls, and that they can do the same things.)
socially constructed inequality	Identifying stereotypes or norms that lead to differences in how boys and girls are treated or experience the world	Ans. to Q2: No, they just think they should think differntly. Because they are basically the same. For example, if there was a boy and a girl who both loved cheese, and there was cheese in front of them, they would both think, "Yum, cheese!" Ans. to Q7: Boy's sports are way more popular than girl's sports, and girls tend

		to have more fashion choices than boys. *(Responses suggest that people are socialized to believe that boys and girls are different, and to respond differently to male-associated things than to female-associated things.)*
separate but equal	Identifying concrete (innate) differences between boys and girls but suggesting these differences neither justify nor lead to differences in how boys and girls are treated or experience the world	Ans. to Q3: Absolutely! Ans. to Q6: Boys are generally more boisterous, and therefore have different house rules apply to them. They have the same chores. *(Responses suggest the writer believes boys and girls are equal, even though they are fundamentally different.)*
separate & unequal	Identifying concrete (innate) differences between boys and girls and suggesting these differences either justify and/or lead to differences in how boys and girls are treated or experience the world	Ans. to Q2: Boys think different things Ans. to Q3: No *(Responses suggest a belief that boys and girls are not only different but also not equal.)*
IDK	Response suggests confusion or lack of clarity about whether there exist differences in how boys and girls are treated or experience the world	Ans. to Q3: I do not now Ans. to Q4: I don't think so *(Response provides insufficient evidence for determining the writer's beliefs about gender.)*

Each set of responses was only tagged once, and all responses were placed into one of the categories above.

These tags were applied across students' responses to the six questions listed above, and one student's set of responses may therefore have received more than one tag. The comparative charts below illustrate the clusters of responses from pre- to post-assessment (Figure 29, Table 5).

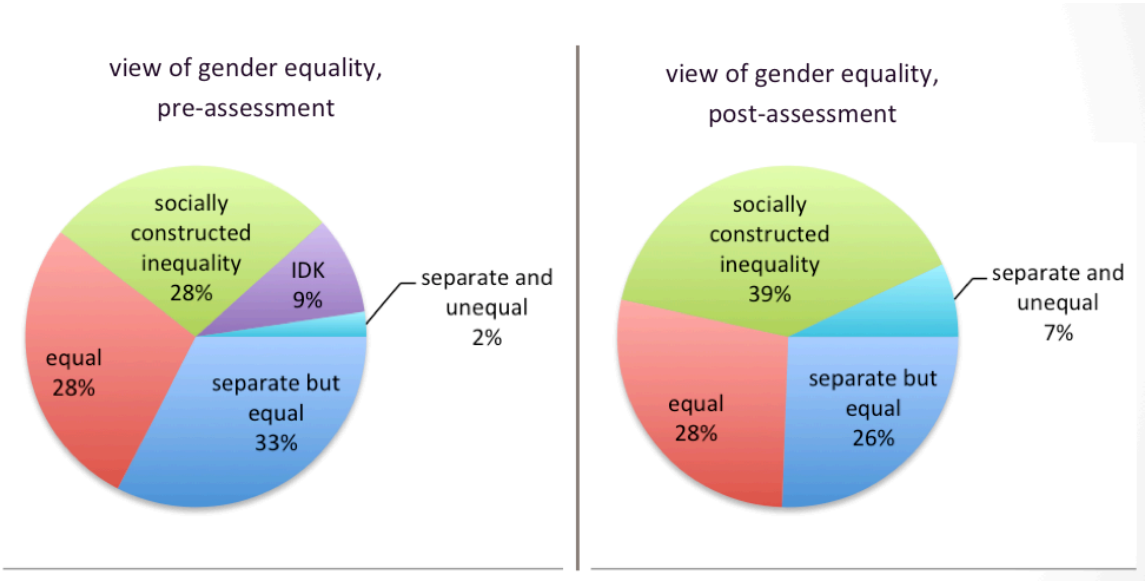


Figure 29: Distribution of student views of gender equality in pre- and post-assessment responses

	separate but equal	equal	socially constructed inequality	IDK	separate & unequal
pre-assessment	14	12	12	4	1
final	11	12	17	0	3

Table 5: Count of student views of gender equality, clustered by category and divided into pre- and post- responses.

The shifts indicated in the charts above may seem small, but a few aspects are important to consider. First, the number of responses categorized as "I don't know" decreased from 4 to 0—by the end of the trans*literacies unit, all students were able and willing to present a theory about gender equality. This, certainly, should be considered a sort of minimum requirement for any unit addressing gender and social norms; and I do not consider this a particularly laudable accomplishment. I do, however, consider it an indication that the intervention met the minimum requirement, by ensuring that all students could, by the end, make a claim about gender.

Second, the numbers suggest a fairly dramatic shift toward "socially constructed inequality." The number of responses in this category increased by 41.7 percent, from 12 to 17. Five students make up 11 percent of all students who completed both the pre- and post-assessment, and 17 students comprise 39.5 percent of the total, compared to 27.9 percent in the pre-assessment.

Given the resilience of the "normals" view of gender, given that students in my study began the intervention showing signs that they had already internalized dominant, binaristic norms about gender, and given the comparatively small amount of time students spend exploring gender diversity in the trans*literacies intervention relative to the amount of time in their lives that they had spent learning how to reproduce societal norms about gender, I consider the shifts described above as indicators of the intervention's success. Teaching about gender diversity is challenging for many reasons, not least of which being that the trans*theoretical perspective flies directly in the face of what most children have learned about gender from their earliest experiences on. The shifts in the pre-to post-assessment, along with the more qualitative shifts of individual students that I describe in this and the previous chapter, suggest that across the class, important changes in theorizing and critiquing gender norms developed.

Chapter Six

The value and challenge of teaching gender as a performative endeavor

Throughout this dissertation, I have framed gender as a performative *endeavor*—but *not* a performative *achievement*. This is a crucial distinction: From the perspective of trans* theory, the power of gender lies in its idealized nature, in its presence as a standard to which all must be socialized to aspire even though success is impossible (Halberstam, 2011). Gender, from this perspective, is an interactional activity—a performance—and all performances vary both from all other performances and from the idealized gender norm.

The trans*literacies intervention was designed to highlight the notion of gender as performative and to underscore the point that gender variance is a common, shared experience. In this intervention, "gender variance" encompasses two experiences: The experience of straying from social expectations in performing one's gender, and the experience of shifting one's gender performance as one moves across contexts in order to align with the expectations of those different contexts.

In this chapter, I describe what came of these efforts to emphasize the performative nature of gender and to frame gender variance as a common, shared experience. I was hoping for more movement in students' thinking about these issues than I observed. Ultimately, however, I noted small shifts in how students talked about gender and in how they described gender. I choose to treat these small shifts as signs of hope: that students emerged from the trans*literacies intervention prepared to engage differently with gender in the future. Further, these shifts—and the intervention through which they emerged—can be informative for future scholarship in this area.

As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, the trans*literacies approach to teaching about gender fluency integrated critical, creative, and performance-based elements, and considers all three to be integral aspects of fluency with gender. Chapters 4 and 5 highlight primarily the critical and creative aspects, while this chapter outlines some outcomes of integrating performance into the intervention.

I have noted elsewhere that this dissertation frames performance as a new media literacy skill, in line with Jenkins et al. (2009)'s new media literacies framework that defines performance as "the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery" (p. 47). Educators interested in developing learners' new media literacies skills have taken up the concept of performance to address the ethical concerns of adopting multiple identities across primarily online contexts (James, 2009), to develop curricula of multiliteracies (Husbye, 2013), and to engage learners in antioppressive pedagogies and practices with new media (Wardrip-Fruin & Harrigan, 2004). These approaches are important because they highlight that today's youth move across a wider variety of social contexts, with a wider variety of norms and valued practices, than has any prior generation of learners (Ito et al., 2010). However, the trans* theoretical perspective adds an additional angle to the notion of performance, focusing on the performative nature of gender. Recall that the trans* theoretical gender framework holds gender to be the product of social norms, local instantiations of those norms, and the ways in which individuals convert their physical traits into gendered expression across local norms and within a society. Gender is never, from this perspective, what somebody *is*; gender is what someone *does*. Gender is, in other words, a performative endeavor and one whose success relies on an ability to quickly grasp local norms

(Bornstein, 2013). In this sense, people can be viewed as always performing gender—which explains why people commonly do not fully realize that they are engaged in a performance.

Gender performance is framed in this dissertation as a key skill of gender fluency and as a new media literacy skill. It is not simply that people must learn skills for "reading" gender norms and the gender expression of others and "writing" their own expressions across their bodies; gender fluency also develops through engagement with cultural narratives about gender. Increasingly, these narratives are communicated through transmedia formats—and television shows, advertising, music, video games, digital social networks, and other new media platforms figure strongly into how these norms are shaped and shifted over time (Carter & Steiner, 2003; Gauntlett, 2008; Gill, 2007).

A unified theory of transmedia literacy and gender fluency must, then, account for the performative aspects of gender in addition to creative and critical engagement with media messages. The three forms of engagement complement each other, since gender performance is a creative appropriation of available tools for expressing gender, and performance is more effective when people can engage in critique of forms of gendered expression that have come before them. Likewise, critical and creative engagement can be informed by issues of performance, because this enables learners to consider how gender is enacted locally and how they participate in or resist dominant narratives about gender.

This chapter focuses on what emerged from activities emphasizing performative aspects of gender. Performance-based curricula are divided into two aspects: activities that support the practices of adopting and performing alternatively gendered identities,

and activities that invite learners to consider their own and others' shifting performances of gender across contexts and time.

This aspect of the intervention and the features that emphasized creative and critical engagement with media were designed as complementary elements. I intended students to come to understand that dominant cultural messages about gender are not simply problematic because they erase and efface the experiences of individuals who identify as transgender or gender variant, but also because they have the same effect on all individuals' everyday experiences. To paraphrase Walt Whitman, we all contain multitudes of gender identities, and the existence of these multiple identities works in contradiction to the dominant belief that gender is a stable, fixed identity category (Butler, 1997; J. Butler, 2004; Halberstam, 2005).

The gender-as-performance principle that was embodied at several points throughout the trans*literacies intervention is also aligned to this study's emphasis on transmedia theory and new media literacies. Performing gender mindfully in any given context requires individuals to appropriate cultural artifacts—colors, clothes, tools, and so on—and to combine those artifacts with gesture, facial expression, body posture, voice, and other visual and aural cues (Bornstein, 2013). That the feat of gender performance goes largely unremarked in most situations—except when a given gender performance violates the tacit rules of gender—attests to the high level of gender fluency that members of a society develop, and quite quickly.

It is precisely the unquestioned nature of gender performance that must be challenged in order to support learners in developing their ability to critique and challenge the systems through which these norms are communicated. In the case of this

dissertation, the primary focus of challenge is on transmedia narratives that communicate the "normals" approach to gender at nearly every turn.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will describe efforts during the trans*literacies intervention to foreground the performative aspect of gender. I begin by describing the instructional approach undertaken by Elly and me, then detailing how this approach was applied during the Dinner Party activity—an activity that explicitly integrated performance of identity with media literacy practices. I then describe the Gender Line activity, which was designed to drive home the point that we all perform gender differently at different points in our lives, and that this can lead to confusion and conflict. Finally, I describe shifts from pre- to post-assessment in how students described culturally valued approaches to determining the gender identities of people they meet.

Instructional Approach

Although gender variance is a key aspect of the trans*literacies unit, the teachers and I included very little direct instruction that addressed this topic directly. Instead, we chose to approach it at a slant: We rooted discussions of gender variance in students' experiences with and observations of gender, offering additional examples from children's books that tackle gender variance or present stories of gender nonconforming children. We did not talk about transgender individuals, did not devote time during the unit to discussing people whose assigned gender varies from their felt gender identity. To the extent that the term "transgender" was used, it was introduced by children—often inaccurately, to describe a color, an article of clothing, a toy, etc., that is unisex or that

appeals to people across gender categories. At these times, Elly would gently correct inaccurate uses of the term "transgender," offering a more accurate term such as "gender neutral" or "unisex."

There were three reasons for avoiding direct instruction about transgenderism. First, a significant body of work in cultural studies and multicultural education warns against practices of fetishizing the marginalized Other (Curran, 2006; Hall, 1996; Naficy, 1991; Smith, 1989). Kumashiro (2000; 2002) argues that this can be an unfortunate side effect of instructional approaches that hold up the Other—in this case, the transgender individual—for examination by members of a dominant group. Instead of what he calls "education about the Other," Kumashiro invites educators to avoid the "us vs. them" approach and to adopt instead an approach that emphasizes that "oppression is produced by discourse, and in particular, is produced when certain discourses (especially ways of thinking that privilege certain identities and marginalize others) are cited over and over" (2002, p. 50).

My experiences of teaching adult learners about transgender issues aligns with Kumashiro's point. For two years prior to the trans*literacies intervention, I participated in education panels in university classes. These panels featured several trans*identified individuals, including me, and were designed as invitations to students to ask questions and become more familiar with transgenderism and trans* issues. Often during these panels, it felt to me as if audience members were using the trans* panelists as a sort of litmus test to make sure *they* were not trans*. *When you were a kid, did you ever….? What's the difference between wanting people to think you're a tomboy and being trans? How did you know you were different?* These and other questions seemed designed as

attempts by students to get reassurance that *they* were fine—that they were not trans* and therefore were "normal."

I did not want to reinforce the cis/trans* dichotomy that is documented in the literature on cisnormativity and transnormativity (e.g., Halberstam, 2005; Meyerowitz, 1998; Monro, 2005) and that I experienced in my prior educational efforts around trans* issues. I therefore worked with Elly and Rick to develop a focus instead on discourses around "normal" gender performances and the ways in which gender is enforced and gender variance is policed by social structures.

Second, although no student in the 4/5 classroom had, to Elly's or Rick's knowledge, come out as transgender, I wanted to *act as if* one or more students did, or might in the future, identify as trans*. This is not an unreasonable approach to teaching about gender variance, given recent research on increasing rates of transgenderism among all segments of the American population. Recent studies suggest that, depending on one's definition, between 0.1% and 2% of adults are transgender, and Brill and Pepper (2013) argue that as many as 1 in 500 American children are "significantly gender variant or transgender" (p. 2), with more children falling somewhere on the trans* spectrum. There is a significant body of evidence suggesting that those who are struggling over their sexual or gender identities may feel increased levels of stress and distress when subjected to activities that explicitly focus on their area of emotional struggle (D'Augelli, 1989; Harris & Jones, 2014; Nadal & Mendoza, 2013). I draw again here on my own experiences of coming out as first queer and then trans*. In the time leading up to and during my early years of coming out, any encounter with queer or trans* issues in the classroom—whether I was taking on a student role or leading a discussion as an

instructor—were likely to make me feel tokenized, overexposed, and isolated. I did not want to visit the same experience on any child participating in my intervention.

The third reason for avoiding direct instruction on gendervariance is ontological: From the trans*theoretical perspective, all individuals can be considered to be "somewhere on the trans* spectrum." Cisgenderism—the experience of having one's gender identity align perfectly with one's biological sex—is constructed simultaneously as an idealized state and a functional impossibility (Jimenez, 2014). If cisgenderism is unattainable, it requires people to continue to strive for it—and, therefore, to continue to value it. The experience of living as a gendered being, moving through social contexts that convey expectations about gender-appropriate behavior and offer a set of tools for expressing gender in ways that align with or resist these expectations, is an experience of varying one's gender according to context. From this perspective, positioning gender variance as the domain of the explicitly transgendered individual is inaccurate, inappropriate, and unethical.

Instead of discussing transgenderism, then, I chose to discuss gender variance as a common, shared experience. I wanted to avoid treating transgenderism as the domain of a select few who are born into the wrong body: I wanted instead to provide opportunities to consider gender variance as something most, and perhaps all, of them had experienced at some point in their lives. I therefore worked with the teachers to develop activities that enabled students to explore their own experiences with gender variance, to perform alternative gender identities, and to critique societal norms about appropriate forms of gender expression.

Gender as performance: The Dinner Party activity

As I note above, I worked with Elly and Rick to ground activities in the trans*literacies intervention in students' real-world experiences with gender, and to link these activities to issues of relevance to their everyday lives. Sometimes this meant asking them to write down what they've noticed about differences in chores, family and school expectations, preferences, and interests across genders; sometimes it meant asking them to think about experiences when their performance of gender was interpreted unfairly or incorrectly; and sometimes, as with the dinner party activity, it meant inviting students to perform a differently gendered position from the one they inhabited in their daily lives.

The dinner party activity was adapted from Bornstein's (2013) activity of the same name, designed to demonstrate how gender can be viewed as "an interactive phenomenon, as opposed to…some essential component of our identities" (p. 115). In this activity, students brainstormed a list of a few dozen literary, historical, and popular culture characters; students then volunteered to participate in short (2-5 minute) improv exercises in which they were semi-randomly assigned to play one of the characters at a dinner party. (Assignment was semi-random because for the majority of the activity students drew names at random from a bag, but the teacher at times chose characters for students based on which characters he believed they would know and feel comfortable performing, and later, because he wanted them to play characters who varied from their assigned genders.). In total, 106 improvisations occurred over 20 dinner party scenes; these stretched over four 50-minute class sessions during the students' performing arts period. The class was divided into two smaller groups during arts time; half of the class

attended performing arts while the other half attended fine arts, and on the following day the class assignments switched.

Not all 106 performances were of equal quality; several students seemed nervous or reluctant to "get into character" when they took their turn. (It is worth noting, however, that participation was voluntary, and a small number of students chose not to take a turn at all; presumably, the students who volunteered felt comfortable enough to try their hand at improv.) Some students, however, gave particularly strong performances—they adopted mannerisms that convincingly suggested their character, or they engaged in wordplay that demonstrated an awareness of their character, what their character would be thinking, and what their character would say. In these cases, the audience became more actively engaged: They laughed, they whispered to each other, they repeated what a character had said or shouted out other words or phrases they thought the character might say. This was all the more striking in comparison to the audience reaction to performances that were not as strong: In those instances, students were polite but quiet and still. This was true across both groups of students, across all four days.

Drawing on the guiding principles of CHAT, I treated each group of students, along with the performing arts teacher, as an activity system. Together, through their words and actions, they negotiated a shared object of activity. Jeff, the performing arts teacher, described this object as "really becoming this person." The students reinforced this near the end of the dinner party activity by volunteering praise for classmates who gave convincing performances:

Mason, praising a male-assigned classmate who played Katniss Everdeen: “He really took on the ((laughs, lifts both hands up and drops them, twice, as if seeking help for the word he is trying to think of))

Jeff: Persona.

Mason: Yeah.

Natalie: I think that, um, Kay as Eleanor Roosevelt was really good because she mentioned Theodore Roosevelt? And his many animals.

Jeff, summarizing this conversation for the other half of the class in the following day, explained:

The thing we noticed the most yesterday is people were having conversations in the scene? And really were becoming those characters, were embodying all of the physical gestures, and, not just showing you, hey, I am this person, but really becoming this person.

Not all students were equally skilled at working toward the shared object of “really becoming this person,” but the class as a whole worked to support and encourage those students who did perform their characters convincingly. That is to say that the labor was divided: Student volunteers were encouraged to turn in a convincing performance, and the audience was assigned to give as much encouragement as a performance merited.

In what follows, I highlight some performances that were not only treated by the audience as working toward the shared object of "really becoming this person" but that also highlighted some issue related to gender and gender performance.

Gender-based drag: Drawing on voice and gesture

Student performances highlighted a sophisticated awareness of the role of body language, facial features, and voice in communicating gender. This was most evident in performances that aligned most closely with "drag"—that is, performances in which children played opposite-gender characters. For example, David, a male-assigned 4th grader, drew "Queen Elizabeth" and was designated to host a dinner party with guests Michael Jackson, Indiana Jones, Homer Simpson, and Eleanor Roosevelt (Figure 30).

Figure 30: A dinner party scene featuring five historical, popular culture, and fictional characters.

As Queen Elizabeth got into character, she rose the pitch of her voice noticeably, and lifted her eating utensils daintily, as if to evoke "proper" femininity. She even instructed her guests to lift one pinkie in the air as they ate (Figure 31).

Figure 31: Queen Elizabeth demonstrates to her dinner party guests how to hold their pinkie properly.

In a later round, Mila, a female-assigned 4th grader, was assigned to play "James Bond" and, when prompted by the teacher to consider how her character would sit, shifted in the chair to embody her character (Figure 32). The first image above depicts Mila's "natural" seated position as she begins the activity, after she has drawn her character but before she has gotten into character. In the first image, Mila is sitting in a traditionally feminine pose, with her legs crossed above the knee and her hands placed in her lap. Her body is compact and tightly controlled, her posture straight and a small smile across her face. When it is time to begin the scene, the teacher invites students to embody the physical aspects of their characters:

> Take a moment to find your character's body. What is their body, how do they sit? How do they hold their silverware? How do they sit? How do they act?

Figure 32: Mila, assigned to play James Bond, before she was encouraged to get into character (left) and changing her body posture to align with her character (center and right).

When invited to embody James Bond, Mila's body begins to take up more physical space. He shifts his legs into a more traditionally masculine position, with one ankle resting on the opposite upper thigh and the body slouching across the chair. He holds his hands in front of his face, fingers curved inward in a gesture suggesting nonchalance—very different from Mila's initial posture and facial expression when she first sat in her chair. Throughout the improv session, James Bond gestures in an expansive, traditionally masculine way. He acts bored when other guests are talking, drops his hand firmly and audibly to the table to direct partygoers' attention to him, and speaks in a somewhat lower pitch than does Mila in her everyday life.

Gesture, body posture, and vocal pitch are key factors for both performing gender and perceiving the gender identity of others (Butler, 1988; Danet, 1998; Fu, Chinchilla, & Galvin, 2004). These are also well known tools for drag performers, who are in the business of convincing audience members to suspend disbelief, or alternatively, to revel in the dissonance of a finely tuned drag performance (Rupp, Taylor, & Shapiro, 2010; E. Shapiro, 2007). The students participating in my study brought to the dinner party what

seemed to be innate knowledge about some of these tools. As David, Mila, and many of their classmates suggested in their cross-gender performances, body language and intonation can be used to effectively convey a gender identity even when other factors—such as physiology—are misaligned. Disbelief can be suspended when James Bond looks like a nine-year-old girl, if his voice and body language are sufficiently masculine. David, whose voice is unusually high for a biologically male child his age, must still raise his pitch to unnaturally higher tones in order to effectively channel the female Queen Elizabeth. It does not matter that the voice of an adult woman would likely be lower in pitch than is David's natural speaking voice; what matters is that he has raised his pitch, signifying to the audience that he is crossing the gender boundary.

Drag tactics in "same"-gender performances

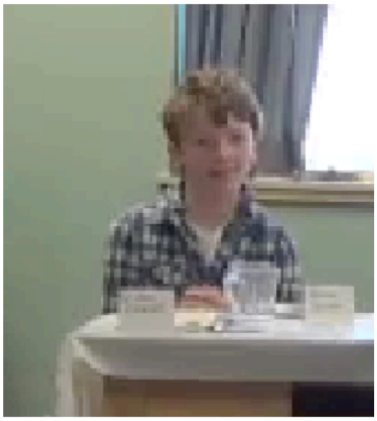
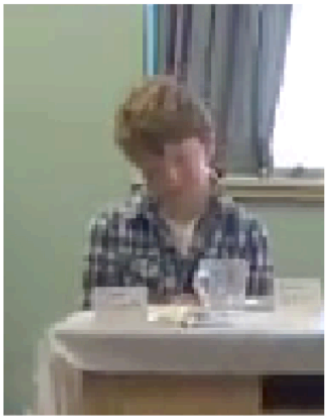
Cross-gender performances—what queer theorists would consider "drag"—were the most obvious sites of gender play in the dinner party activity. However, it was not always possible—and, from the theoretical perspectives driving this study, not wholly ethical—to resort to the gender binary in order to determine when a student was performing drag. For example, a female-assigned student assigned to play Dora the Explorer, the 7-year-old, female-assigned hero of her eponymous animated series, might raise the pitch of her voice and use exaggeratedly feminine gestures to convey Dora's girlish, childlike mannerisms. In fact, this is precisely what Mila does when she is assigned Dora: She raises the pitch of her voice and looks at other dinner party guests with a broad, open-mouthed smile on her face. Her performance of Dora is similar in

many ways to the performances of many male-assigned students playing female characters—and the converse of her earlier performance of James Bond.

Similarly, a male-assigned student assigned to play the pop singer Michael Jackson might adopt more feminine gestures in order to channel Jackson's famously effeminate body language. In fact, this is precisely what Chris, a male-assigned fifth grader, did when he drew Michael Jackson's name during the early round of the dinner party hosted by David-as-Queen-Elizabeth. Michael Jackson is known for his music, certainly, but he is also known for his androgynous appearance and effeminate mannerisms (Davis, 2003). The children in my study, who were all between eight and 12 years old, were too young to have been temporal witness to Jackson's transformation—his increasing gender nonconformity that some have equated with transgenderism (e.g., Fuchs, 1995). He was familiar to many students, who also knew at least snippets of two of his most popular songs, "Bad" and "Thriller;" and his gender nonconformity—as Chris illustrates with the imaginary hair-flip—is also part of Michael Jackson's public persona.

After Queen Elizabeth tells a story about a dinner party guest whom she had executed for throwing a cake at her, Michael Jackson looks at her and says "I NEED to write a song about that." He then looks at the audience and tosses his head as if flipping imagined long hair over his shoulder (Figure 33).

Figure 33: Chris, performing as Michael Jackson, flips his hair over one shoulder.


Certainly there is some gender play here—Chris is indexing a gesture that tends to be viewed as more effeminate than masculine (perhaps primarily because it is a gesture that requires long hair). However, I want to extend this discussion of gender performance to include a brief discussion of Chris's choice to appropriate shared cultural references about his assigned character. His primary accomplishment—one that the audience appreciated audibly—was in weaving references to song titles into his performance:

1	QE[2]	Ok. (1.0) ((*sets cup on table*)) <u>One</u> ti::me, (1.0) ((*voice of QE is significantly*
2		*higher than the child's normal speaking voice, throughout the performance*))
3		I was eating dinner with a <u>friend</u> and (1.0) he, (2.0) ((*shifts in chair, leans*
4		*forward*)) threw a cake at me so I called the executioner, (1.0) and, (1.0) I
5		have his head on the <u>wall</u>.
6		((*laughter from the audience and Eleanor Roosevelt for 2.0*))
7		((*holds up hand close to face, index finger extended, and jabs it at Eleanor*
8		*Roosevelt*)) So [<u>watch out</u>.]
9	HS	[Donuts.]
10		((*general laughter for 4.5*))
11	MJ	((*looks at QE*)) I <u>need</u> to write a song about that.
12	QE	You <u>should</u>. ((*nods*))
13		(3.0)
14	MJ	((*Looks at audience, makes gesture suggesting he is tossing imagined long*

[2] In this section of transcript, speakers are denoted by the initials of their assigned character and audience members are denoted with "AU." Characters include Queen Elizabeth (QE), Homer Simpson (HS), Michael Jackson (MJ), and Indiana Jones (IJ).

15 *hair over his left shoulder))*
16 ((*brief discussion of Indiana Jones' whip))*
17 MJ This food is thrilling. ((*looks at QE, smiles, looks at other dinner party*
18 *guests, smiling, then looks down at plate and begins cutting imaginary*
19 *food*))
20 QE I know.
21 ((*laughter from audience interspersed with*))
22 IJ Anybody have a whip
23 Thriller (*(sung in the tune of the song "Thriller"))*

Later in the scene, Michael Jackson tells his back story:

24 MJ Yeah. My dad got really mad at me because I started dancing after I was
25 singing. It was dreadful. He's like, (1.5) what you're gonna dance instead of
26 sing? (2.0) So I'm like, (3.5) yeah, I'm bad. ((*immediate laughter from*
27 *audience, interspersed with*))
28 AU What? ((*said in confused tone*))
29 AU I'm bad. ((*sung in tune of song "Bad"))*
30 MJ It's pretty thrilling.
31 (4.0)
32 AU HAHA Michael Jackson jokes.
33 QE There any chance your brother is Michael Jackson, I mean Michael Jordan?
((*audience laughter for 2.0*))
34 MJ He's just the man in the mirror, I mean (0.4) probably not.

In lines 17, 26, 30, and 34, Chris integrates song titles into his performance as Michael Jackson. Although this is not a "realistic" performance—it's unlikely that the "real" Michael Jackson would have spoken to others using the titles of his songs—this approach *is* an effective means of conveying insider knowledge about Michael Jackson. Audience members demonstrate that they are in on the joke by laughing appreciatively, and individual students even sing back the phrases, as if to say: I see what you did there; and I, too, am in on the joke.

Gender performance as a new media literacy practice

Chris's effort illustrates the new media literacies practice of appropriation, the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content (H. Jenkins, Clinton, K., Purushotma, R., Robinson, A.J., & Weigel, M., 2009). The form that Chris's appropriation takes—improvisation in an offline context—is a form of literacy that is not commonly discussed in research on media literacy skills, in large part because it is written across the body—and this form of inscription does not align with the features of digital technology that most commonly confound and interest media studies scholars. These researchers have focused their research lenses primarily on formats that feature searchability, replicability, persistence, and invisible audiences (boyd, 2008)—that is, text-based or audiovisual digital formats.

Queer and trans* theory, however, are interested in what can be, and is, written across the body: In the ways in which identity and literacy emerge in interaction. We might refer to Chris's performance as pop culture-based drag. If gender-based drag is a cross-gender performance designed to "(describe) discontinuities between gender and sex or appearance and reality" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 236) then pop culture drag may be a cross-cultural performance that makes visible discontinuities between cultural identities. It's not just that Chris—a white, middle class 10-year-old—is performing as an African American, adult, highly stylized pop singer; it's also that Chris's send-up of Michael Jackson highlights discontinuities between Michael Jackson *the person* and the cultural references Michael Jackson has come to symbolize. It is, perhaps, that discontinuity that leads to students' appreciative laughter.

At least two forms of discontinuity are evident, then, in Chris's performance as Michael Jackson: A discontinuity between Chris's assigned gender identity and the gender he performs as Michael Jackson; and a discontinuity between Michael Jackson's public persona and Chris's highly stylized, reference-laden performance of Michael Jackson.

It is not common to treat gender literacy as a literacy of new media, but in fact the two are so tightly interwoven that is not clear what benefit comes from treating them as separate forms of literacy. Not all students were as willing to attempt to integrate pop culture and gendered body language into their improv performances; Chris, who outside of school acts with a community theater group and is a member of a musical group that gives public performances, was particularly advanced in his improvisational skills. However, the transcript above also suggests how deeply the class understood and appreciated his efforts. Each time Chris referenced a Michael Jackson song, at least one student sang a snippet, perhaps to demonstrate that they were in on the joke, that they got Chris's reference. New media literacies are, after all, literacies of reading *and* writing—critical *and* creative skills. Bornstein (2013) argues that drag performances require an audience; so, too, do performances of celebrity.

What did students learn?

The Dinner Party activity was designed to provide students an opportunity to perform gender identities that varied from their own, and to observe how various students drew on shared cultural references and gendering resources in order to accomplish the improvisational activity. The class spent two hour-long sessions watching these

performances, then I asked them to reflect on what they had noticed, by providing a worksheet with three prompts:

1. How did this activity push your thinking about drama/performance?
2. How did this activity push your thinking about gender?
3. Make a sketch that represents this activity.

Of 50 submitted worksheets, 29 both claimed that the activity did push their thinking about gender and also provided an explanation. The remaining 21 worksheets were not analyzed because they did not include a response to question 2, asserted that the activity did not push their thinking about gender, or asserted that the activity did push their thinking about gender but did not include an explanation about how, when, or why. (For example, one student simply wrote "pretty good" in response to question 2. Because it was impossible to interpret the meaning of this response, it was discarded.)

As an interesting companion story, a much larger percentage of female-assigned students than male-assigned students wrote about how the activity pushed their thinking about gender. Fourteen out of 19, or 73.7 percent, of girls wrote about gender in their responses, whereas only 16 out of 31 boys, or 48.4 percent, did. This should not be surprising to anybody who studies any form of social inequity: Those who are most impacted by a given social structure—those who belong to a traditionally marginalized group—are generally far more likely to notice when that social structure is in play (Flagg, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; McIntosh, 1998; Slesaransky-Poe & García, 2013).

Each of the 29 responses was categorized into one of six groups, as detailed in the table below. I have included the text of all 29 responses, separated by group and further divided by gender.

Below, I have included the text of all 29 responses, separated into categories (Table 6). I also indicate, with an (F) or an (M), whether the response came from a female-assigned or a male-assigned student.

Category & (count)	Responses (F)	Responses (M)
Had to act differently (7)	• It pushed me to think about my character because sometimes I was a boy and had to act differently. • It made some of us push our thinking until the point where we had to act in a different gender. So I think it really pushed our thinking.	• I thought about being a girl • Well at the end I was a girl then boy • (When I was Einstein) I said a lot of scientific stuff to Dora knowing she wouldn't know. • I had to think differently when I was a girl.
It was fun / funny / I wanted to play a different gender (5)	• As I watched all the other people play other gender, it seemed like they were having a good time. I think it would be fun to try being a different gender. • It pushed it by having a girl play a boy part is actually really fun because some people wonder what would it be like if we were the opposite Gender! • It pushed my thinking about gender because it was funny a lot when the girls were boy characters.	• I wanted to be Harriet the Spy because I know a lot about it and know what to do • It's funny to act like a girl.
Boys who played girls had to change their voice (5)	• It didn't really push anything for me but, for other people it might have made them realize how a gender is supposed to act. (Also how their voice is,	• When I was Dora I thought I should have a girl voice • When I was a girl in I had to make up a girl voice

	stuff like that.) • All the boys playing girls used high pitched voices.	• I had to think if I picked a female character I would have to talk in a more high-pitched voice.
It was hard/ awkward/ weird / confusing (4)	• It pushed my thinking because I forgot if a boy was a girl or if a girl was a boy • That it was awkward	• Weird, because why would boys want to be girl characters • Seeing people acting as a different gender made me think that it is hard to be someone who is not you
It was easy (4)	• It pushed my thinking by teaching me that anyone can bring their talents to life by being other gender as their character.	• I think I saw that a boy can act very easily like a girl, and a girl can act very easily like a boy, if they want to. • Any boy can play as a girl • That if you are a boy you can act like a girl.
Other (4)	• It pushed my thinking about gender because I saw that mostly everyone played their opposite gender.	• Gender's big. • Some people who were boy they were girls and girls were boys. • I thought that there were a lot more male characters who were being acted

Table 6: Count and text of all student responses, clustered by category and divided by gender assignment of respondent.

I want to draw your attention first to the presence in the table above of the aspect of gender performance that was clearly most evident to students: The phenomenon of boys raising the pitch of their voices when they were assigned a female character. One female-assigned student in the class even draw a picture to illustrate this phenomenon (Figure 34):

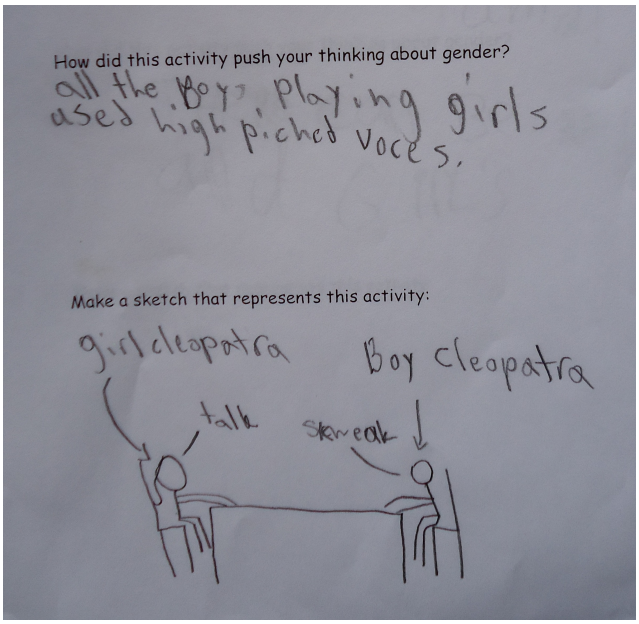


Figure 34: Illustration by one student of the phenomenon of boys raising the pitch of their voices to portray female characters.

Change in vocal pitch was not the only resource appropriated by students to perform a different gender, but it was the only one students wrote about in their reflections. Four students also wrote, reflecting on how the activity had pushed their thinking about gender, that it was "easy" to play a different gender.

This was the first activity of the trans*literacies unit. It came before any form of instruction, any direct interrogation of gender. What I hoped for—and what I saw—was students trying on variously gendered identity positions, reflecting on the challenges of doing so, and perhaps noting some trends in how their classmates engaged with this activity and what made it challenging. I was delighted to see that the dinner party activity provided them with an opportunity to do this.

Normalizing gender variance: Misgendering and the gender line activity

Gender variance, in the dinner party activity with performance of popular culture, was treated by the class as acceptable, as appropriate, as clever or funny. Acceptance of gender variance seemed to end, however, at the boundaries of the dinner party set. In the classroom, students generally obeyed the rules of gender and made it clear, at various points during the intervention, that they not only believed it was inappropriate to perform gender variance in the "real world" but also that they saw themselves as inhabiting a clear, stable gender identity across a variety of contexts. This was evident in Chris's insistence, described in greater detail in chapter xx, that boys would not wear dresses or play with toys designed for girls. Students also described other ways in which they would not violate gender norms, or reasons why it's offensive to be accused of behaving like the "opposite" gender:

> Emily, a female-assigned fifth grader, describing her choice of avatars in the popular children's computer game Animal Jam: "When I first tried it I got on and I thought these one eyes looked cool, but I was worried that people would think I was a boy when I was playing it."
>
> Chris, discussing with Elly the time he wore a dress to school for "Character Day": "I wouldn't have done that in real life, but that was dressing up as a character."
>
> Zane, a male-assigned fifth grader, talking about how some people insult boys by saying "you scream like a girl": "If they say you scream like a girl, well I just want to say like, I scream, and I scream like a Zane. And I am a boy, not a girl, as you can see."

In these examples, students made it clear that they know that there are rules for performing gender "in real life"—and that they cannot and should not violate those rules.

Further, Zane points to another fundamental belief: That he inhabits a stabled, fixed gender category—even if his behavior seems to others to contradict it.

Elly and I wanted to disrupt students' beliefs about what sorts of activities constitute gender variance. Although the descriptions above would certainly be considered gender transgressions, students engaged in all sorts of small transgressions of gender—engaged in gender variance—in many ways. I wanted to help them to see that it is not just gender identity that is a spectrum but also that gender performance itself falls along a spectrum.

Elly and I decided to do this in two ways: First, by introducing the experience of being misgendered, and second, by providing students with opportunities to identify how they vary their gender and what trends they see across the class.

Learning the rules by violating them: Getting misgendered

Many have argued, compellingly, that children are born queer and they have the queerness slowly and inexorably policed out of their bodies (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004a). (Remember here that queerness is framed from the queer and trans*theoretical perspective as linked both to sexuality and gender.) If gender is a social construct, after all, it follows that we are not born with an innate gender orientation but develop it over time; we are not born knowing the rules of gender-appropriate behavior but develop this knowledge over time. A good deal of this knowledge is developed through gender policing—the work of culture and its inhabitants of notifying individuals when they are in violation of social norms related to gender. Most adults can probably remember a time when they were informed by family members, teachers, neighbors, or peers that they

were doing something that was not "right" for their gender: *Girls don't lift heavy tables. Boys don't like cats. How did you end up in the boys' clothes? The ladies' room is over there.*

Moments of having one's gender policed are also, importantly, interrupted moments of gender variance. Often, for children, these moments are unintentional—but having the opportunity to reflect on these moments after they have happened can provide insights into how we learn the overt and subtle rules of gendered behavior across contexts.

I wanted to provide such an opportunity to students. I wanted to give them an opportunity to consider the phenomenon of *being misgendered*—defined here as the experience of being perceived as a different gender than the one with which one identifies, or of receiving messages that one's behavior or clothing is not appropriate for their assigned gender.

I have not yet noted that I considered my own gendervariant body as a feature of the trans*literacies curriculum—a literal embodiment of the performative nature of gender. To date, scholarship advancing design-based research methods has not yet created room for the researcher's body, except as a vehicle for delivering an educational design. My educational design, however, was in an important way precisely about the body through which I delivered it—and I used this to my advantage when introducing the notion of misgendering.

On the day that I first introduced the notion of being "misgendered," I came to school with my breasts bound under a button-down shirt worn tucked into men's slacks. I had recently had my hair cut into an especially masculine style—very short, with a hairline shaped to communicate maleness. From inside of this body, presenting to

students in this study as a female-identified adult named Jenna, I invited them to examine me and my experience of being misgendered:

I want you to think about why:: (0.4) it's such a big deal: if somebody, if somebody looks like they're trying to (0.6) be the other gender. I was thinking about this because one of the questions that (.) we asked you in that pretest that you (0.4) filled out was, (0.8) um:, whether boys and girls are equal and a lot of you said yeah, they're basically the same, but yet (0.8) there are rules about how you're supposed to look, and those rules are important and if (.) peopl:e and I've had this experience of, um, people look at me and they think that I'm a boy, ((*several students look up at me; Sarah nods vigorously*)) and when I talk, they think that I'm a girl, and they apologize if they misgendered me, if they assume that I was a boy and called me a he. Why do they apologize? ((*Sarah raises hand*)) Why is it such a big deal, and I want you to just talk to your neighbors about this if you've had this experience, um, if you've experienced stereotypes or people telling you or judging you because you're wearing clothes that aren't right for your gender or doing things that aren't right for your gender, ok?

In lines 7-8, I make a declarative statement: People look at me and attribute a male gender to me. This statement causes several students to break an established, accepted routine that typically characterized whole-class discussions: They look up at me, turn their bodies toward me, offer visible cues that they are giving me their full attention.

In fact, it seemed to me that for many students, this was the most interesting, engaging issue of the entire trans*literacies intervention. Several students behaved as if they had been waiting for a chance to discuss their experiences with gender policing; once I opened the door to discuss this issue, the stories started spilling through. A male-assigned child with long hair wanted to know why people used to think he was a girl when he was younger (although they don't make that assumption, he said, any longer); a pair of female-assigned children who expressed a preference for clothes purchased from the boys' section of the clothing store talked about having to decide what to do when their grandparents bought them dresses. Sarah, a female-assigned fourth grader, was so

eager to tell her story of being misgendered that she had trouble sitting still. When called on, she described an experience of "gender panic" in a public restroom:

> Well, um, (0.4) kind of like Jenna was saying I've been called a boy before a lot? Because one, (0.4) I wear clothes that are from the boys' aisle and, I used to have my hair short like Jenna's and so, I remember having the experience of one time walking into a girls' bathroom and everybody screaming ah:, it's a boy. (.) An:d, (1.0) um, (.) I really don't ca:re, but, (.) I just think (.) that (0.4) oh, if you're a girl you have to do this ( ) like, it's like oh if you're a girl you have to wear pink. I mean, I see boys wear pink? I see girls wear black, I mean, my friend even has a boy, (0.4) my friend even, he's a boy and he has a shirt that says pink is manly.

On the day that Sarah is describing her experience, her hair is tied into a loose ponytail at the nape of her neck; the hair is long enough to reach between her shoulder blades. Assuming her hair grows at the typical rate of about a half inch per month, it would have taken her at least a year to have grown her hair out from the length at which I was keeping my hair; this means her experience probably occurred when she was no older than eight years old.

An eight-year-old child walks into a girls' bathroom and everybody panics, for fear that the child may be a boy. As Sarah tells the story, it is not that a well-meaning stranger tried to "correct" her or even that a few bathroomgoers were surprised by her presence, but that "everybody" in the bathroom "screamed." Here, Sarah is citing the "gender panic" that leads to regulation of bodies in public spaces—particularly public restrooms, locker rooms, and spaces where bodies are in a state of undress and therefore considered to be particularly vulnerable (K. Browne, 2004; Cavanagh, 2010).

What right does anybody have to try to shame a child in this way? What reason could anybody possibly have to engage in such a public scolding? This is precisely the power of the heterosexual matrix—it empowers all members of a culture to ensure the

matrix is obeyed. Indeed, the very power of the heterosexual matrix is that it recruits all members of a culture to its cause.

Sarah's description of her experience suggests an awareness of the tools used by members of a culture to perceive the gender of others—primarily clothing and hairstyle. She argues for an expanded view of "gender-appropriate" clothing and dress for girls and boys, on the grounds that current norms cause people to be misgendered, misunderstood.

This was an important breakthrough moment in the trans*literacies intervention, a moment when Sarah and other students were clear in stating that they engaged in violation of gender norms *and* that they believed it was the norms, not their behaviors, that needed to change. However, this progress was paired with what seemed like a tacit alignment with the "normals" approach to gender. Sarah's willingness to tell this story may also speak to her sense of herself as "naturally, originally, really, after all" female—as inhabiting a coherent, stable gender identity. Research with transgender and gender variant children suggests they are highly sensitive to suggestions that they have failed in some way to correctly gender themselves—this is true of children who openly identify as transgender or gender variant as well as of children who come out later in life (WO Bockting, Coleman, Ettner, Monstrey, & Eyler, 2007; Zimman, 2009). For Sarah, however, it was so obvious that the people in the bathroom were incorrect in their assessment of her that she does not even feel a need to state this explicitly. Sarah's suggestion, in telling this story, is that she was "right" and the people she encountered, and the rules they seemed to be abiding by, were "wrong": She is clearly female and they misunderstood her to be something other than what she "actually" was. That Sarah felt comfortable sharing this story in a whole class discussion speaks to the degree of support

she expected to feel from her classmates: She probably did not expect them to ridicule her or challenge her "right" to call herself a girl, and they did neither of these things. They listened respectfully, and some classmates described similar experiences before the conversation was wrapped up so students could transition to their next subject.

On the one hand, it would have been nice to be able to say that I pushed students past the "normals" view of gender identity, and toward the queer/trans*theoretical view of gender as flexible, socially constructed, and variant over time. I cannot say that I effectively did this, as I will discuss later in this chapter. However, Sarah's embrace of the "normals" approach to gender does position her and her classmates to critique societal norms that enable others to misinterpret people based on external cues.

It was common throughout this intervention for students to argue that people "should" be able to dress how they want, play with what they want, and wear their hair how they like it. We wanted to push students, too, to begin to understand why people *don't* feel they have full freedom of self-expression—why people feel they *can't* wear what they like or behave however they want. We wanted them to see how societal norms not only delimit the possibilities for gender expression, but also shape our own preferences and behaviors in subtle ways. We did this through the gender line activity described below.

Embracing gender variance as a common, shared experience: The gender line activity

Students' insistence that gender boundaries must be respected were paired, strikingly, with an insistence that people should and, mostly, did feel free to express themselves however they want. Female-assigned children described their willingness to

wear clothes purchased from the boys' section of clothing stores; Laura noted that these clothes were more durable than are those that are marketed to girls, and several students noted that boys' clothes were more comfortable and fit better. Female-assigned children also discussed their love of "boys'" toys and media franchises directed toward boys and men. This was presented, by many female- and male-assigned children in the class, as proof that gender norms do not restrict individuals' freedom to express themselves in whatever way they want.

The converse was not true, however: Not only did no boy, ever, volunteer that he chose to wear "girls'" clothes, but male-assigned students insisted, when asked, that "girls'" clothes did not, for example, fit boys well. Male-assigned students did not express a preference for traditionally feminine colors (although some female-assigned students asserted that they had a male friend who wore pink). Male-assigned students also only rarely asserted that they played with "girls'" toys.

This is wholly in line with dominant attitudes toward gender and gender transgression. It is viewed as normal and appropriate for a girl to wear clothes that are marketed to boys, to eschew traditionally feminine, pastel colors and lacy designs in favor of more masculine colors and designs, since it is only natural that girls would aspire to be like boys (Califia, 1997). The converse cannot, however, be true: Boys cannot and should not aspire to femininity, since femininity and femaleness are viewed as lesser categories of human (Serano, 2009).

However, there is more to this story. The refusal of male-assigned children in my study to profess an interest in girls' toys, colors, and clothes obscured the ways in which boys in my study *did*, indeed, perform gender variance. I am not saying that I did not

believe them when they said they did not engage in traditionally female activities, but that I was certain there were activities *other than* clothing, color, and toy choices that demonstrated variance in how they embodied and performed their gender assignment. Making this visible to students was an important piece of the trans*literacies intervention. In order to help them see how binaristic and essentialist gender norms were problematic, I needed to help them to see how these norms erased or rejected their own experiences with gender variance. As noted above, gender fluency can be considered a form of new media literacy. In the dinner party activity, students demonstrated an awareness of some performative aspects of gender, appropriating gesture, body language, and vocal cues as well as shared cultural references in order to perform an alternative gendered position. Another aspect of gender fluency is an awareness of and ability to critique social norms that dictate what counts as an appropriate performance of gender. In any given context, these unspoken social norms are appropriated and adjusted to meet the interests of a shared community, and individuals must be able to interpret subtle social cues that dictate local gender norms. Fluency with gender includes an ability to make reflective decisions about how one will convert their physical traits into gender expression in a way that accounts for—embraces, resists, or rejects—local and social norms.

I wanted to encourage the students in my study to talk about their experiences with social norms and local interactions, in order to help them to interpret and critique these experiences and to develop a reflective approach to gender expression.

Activity description

The gender line activity invited students to identify moments in which they experienced gender dissonance: Gaps between cultural messages about gender-appropriate behavior and their experiences in performing their gender. Students identified up to three dissonant experiences and wrote each experience on two post-it notes. They then placed these post-it notes on each of two lines. The top line was labeled the "your experience" line, and the bottom line was the "what the world thinks" line.

Students wrote their experiences on post-it notes, two copies of each experience, then placed one copy of each item on each line, according to whether they thought it fell more on the girls' side (right) or boys' side (left).

Given general beliefs and behaviors surrounding gender that were evident in the classroom, it was not surprising to see a difference in how the post-it notes were distributed across each line. The "your experience" line had post-its clumped on the "boy" half of the line, while the "what the world thinks" line had post-its fairly evenly distributed across the line.

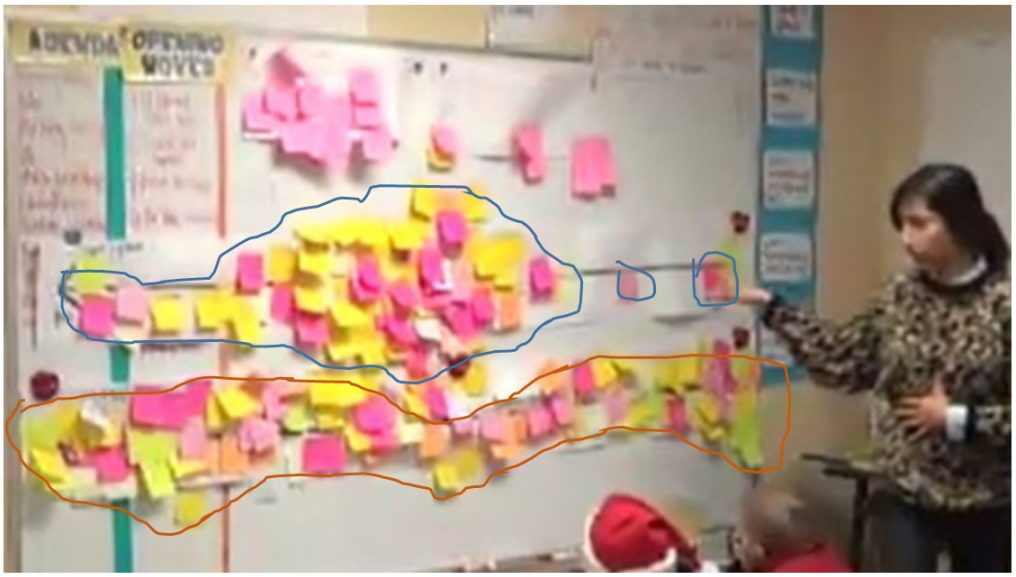


Figure 35: Elly standing next to the completed gender lines, with students' post-it notes clustered differently in each line.

Elly read to the class a selection of post-it notes from each of three sections of each line: The "boy" side, the center, and the "girl" side (Figure 35). I have transcribed the items she read to the class below (Table 7).

	"boy" side	Center	"girl" side
"what the world thinks" line	If someone dressed like a boy and cut their hair short, boyish or girlish. Playing with fire…. Buying a flannel shirt or a girl wearing a basketball jersey, or baseball.	Playing basketball, cars, um, all clothes stores have it separated into boys and girls. Why? We have nerf guns, we have [male-assigned student, identified by name] playing with Lego Friends. We have girls skateboarding is in the middle. We have My Little Pony. Working out.	Over on the girls' side, we have…lots of boys love My Little Pony. I like horses. Pink glasses. My Little Pony. I like pink. Diary. Owning a cat. Wearing pink glasses. Um, a boy watching My Little Pony. Liking purple. Boys liking blue is on the girls' side. Boys liking

			fighting. My Little Pony, lots of My Little Pony over here.
"your experience" line	Boy liking My Little Pony, lots of boys love My Little Pony. Um, boy having the name Sayer. Me watching My Little Pony. Boys playing with Lego Friends. fixing cars. Barbie.	Girl wearing basketball jersey. Someone wearing pink glasses. Saying "he's cute." A boy playing with dolls. Race car driving. Making rainbow loom bracelets. P!nk song. Buying a flannel shirt. Liking purple. Liking to play Minecraft.	Wearing high heels, um, again the post-it about dressing like a boy and cutting hair short. Dressing like a boy and cutting hair short, Blue, in [one student's] opinion goes on that side.

Table 7: List of items from the "gender line" activity, as read to the class by Elly.

In Elly's excerpt from the hundreds of post-it notes affixed to the gender lines, one dramatic difference becomes clear: Girls were willing to admit that they do things that are considered in the domain of masculinity—and are even willing to identify as left of center when it comes to gender. That is, they were willing to say "I am doing something boyish right now, and that makes me less girly." Boys were not willing to do the same, with the glaring exception of My Little Pony. As Chris had explained earlier in the class period, many boys associated with "bronies"—male viewers of My Little Pony. Although theorists of mass media and culture have argued that Bronies subvert normative assumptions about gender and masculinity (Robertson, 2013; Silverstein, 2013), non-academics appear generally to disagree. Across the internet, boys and men are proud to call themselves Bronies, with no apparent need to justify this love or in any way assert their masculinity to counteract the feminine nature of their hobby. At SJA, the same was

true—boys across the school proudly identified as Bronies, without any apparent fear that they would be ridiculed or that their maleness would be called into question.

Boys' willingness to draw on the Brony phenomenon in the gender line activity reinforces this—just as female-assigned students felt perfectly comfortable professing a tendency to wear clothes marketed to boys, male-assigned students felt perfectly comfortable professing an interest in My Little Pony. This identification, as a "brony," is a means of affirming one's masculinity even while engaging in an activity that is considered the domain of girls.

A more important point must be made here: What is considered "normal" by this group is a cluster of activities that are commonly associated with masculinity. The wider distribution in the "what the world thinks" line has to do with the assumption that the world still thinks it's not right—not appropriate, not legitimate—for boys to do girl things.

So it was not surprising or particularly exciting that the post-its were clustered in this way, since it aligned fairly well with dominant norms about gender performnce. What *was* exciting was that the students noticed the disparity.When Elly asks the class what they notice about the lines, Emily offers the following:

1 Emily: Um, well I remem:ber a few, um, (0.8) I remember a bit ago how we talked
2 about how it's ok for, um, for girls to wear more, for girls to wear things
3 that would be considered (.) <u>boy</u> things?
4 Elly: Yeah.
5 Emily: Things that would be considered <u>boy</u> things? (0.4) Because, um, on the
6 your opinion line, it, it's, (0.8) it's more towards the boys' section (0.4) of
7 everything and (toward) the middle, and then, there's a lot of stuff on the (.)
8 boy:: part, and then: there's hardly anything on the <u>girl</u> part? Cause it's
9 more okay, it's okay for girls to wear, (1.0) and do things that are mor:e
10 (0.4) boy (1.2) stuff.

When Emily cites the earlier conversation about rules of dress across the gender spectrum, Elly presses forward with a question she had not asked in the earlier discussion about this issue: Why?

Why are masculine-aligned activities, clothes, and behaviors considered socially appropriate for boys and girls when feminine-aligned clusters of activity are proscribed? Why have female-assigned individuals been given freedom and space to embrace a wider range of discursive spaces while male-assigned individuals continue to have strict limits placed on their decisions?

The answer is that our society is deeply invested in safeguarding masculinity. The continued (re)production of masculinity is predicated on its construction as natural, inevitable, and eternal: Those who accept the terms of masculinity must do so because they cannot imagine how it could ever be otherwise (R. Connell, 1996; Frank, Kehler, Lovell, & Davison, 2003; Pascoe, 2011). The students in my study provided a clear illustration of this acceptance, when Elly asked them to explain why boys are not "allowed" to wear dresses to school and they were unable to account for this rule.

Emily: Cause it's more okay, it's okay for girls to wear, (1.0) and do things that are mor:e (0.4) boy (1.2) stuff.
Elly: Why?
(3.0) ((*Emily pauses, her mouth open, and remains very still while looking at Elly*))
Maybe that's not a question just for Emily. Why is the middle and the boy section of our line ((*gestures toward the top line*)) filled out in our opinion? Why are more things either more gender neutral, or:: masculine than are in our opinion, feminine? (0.8) Sylvie?
Sylvie: Um, well, sort of connected to Emily, um, well, girls are allowed to wear pants and shirts? But boys aren't exactly allowed to wear skirts or dresses.
Elly: But, why? And—and I know that may not be how you think, I just want to

know why. (1.0) Sh::: ((*said to quiet conversations among other students*))
Sylvie: But um, maybe um:, girls think dresses are more girlish, and stuff? And maybe, like, I saw a boy, or one person put up, um, a girl, a girl, on the girls side, a girl holding a boy, uh, a boy's hand, so maybe girls are more into romance? Than boys? And maybe um, has to relate to what they look like?
Male student: Mm-mm ((*said as if to indicate disagreement*))
Elly: Hm:.
Sylvie: Um, (1.0) cause they're more, um, sensitive on what (.) people will think on, like judge them by how they look, maybe?
Elly: Ok. Emily? You answered the million dollar question?
Emily: Um, (0.8) be:cause it's kind of aw:kward::, and a little: s:trange if you were to see a boy wear a dress or a skirt or high heels, (1.2) or makeup, or tiaras, stuff like that.
Elly: Yeah. Why.
((*I chuckle audibly off camera*))
Emily: Cause,
Elly: Why is it awkward?
Emily: I guess cause we're used to, seeing: boys wear pants and t shirts? And it's just, (0.4) it would be weird if all of a sudden, you know, Joshua walked in wearing ((*laughs*))
Joshua: ((*sits up straighter, waves*)) Hi. ((*said in a noticeably higher pitch than his normal speaking voice, though not as if he is impersonating a female*)) ((*quiet laughter from several students*))
Emily: a, a d--wearing a, wearing a dress.
Elly: Yeah, and I, I hear that. I just am curious about why. I--I agree with you. I think people would probably have a certain perception around that. But, but ↑why?↓

In the conversation excerpted above, Elly asks five different times (lines 13, 15-18, 21, 36, and 49) for an account of why boys are not allowed to wear dresses to school. Emily, who first reintroduced this topic (lns 10-12), is unable to answer the question at first. When Elly first asks her to explain her assertion that "It's okay for girls to wear, (1.0) and do things that are mor:e (0.4) boy (1.2) stuff" Emily goes silent and still, apparently unable to collect a response. Sylvie makes an attempt, elaborating on Emily's point and adding that "girls are allowed to wear pants and shirts? But boys aren't exactly

allowed to wear skirts or dresses" (lns. 19-20). When Elly prompts Sylvie to explain ("Why?" line 13), Sylvie offers that girls are "more into romance" and suggests that this is why girls wear dresses—which are "more girlish"—and boys do not.

Sylvie does not draw a fully clear connection between this point about romance and the "rules" about what boys and girls can wear to school. Based on the "romance" theme of the gender collage she produced earlier in the unit, however, she evidently associates femaleness with romance and beauty. Clothes designed for women—and, especially, many skirts and dresses—are created to emphasize beauty and femininity (Gleeson & Frith, 2004)—traits that Sylvie has depicted as clearly linked to femaleness. Masculinity and maleness are not present in her collage, suggesting that they are absent from her concepts of beauty/romance/femaleness. For Sylvie, dresses and skirts are feminine attire that are therefore the domain only of people who are female. She adds that girls are "more, um, sensitive on what (.) people will think on, like judge them by how they look" (lns. 30-31). This assertion is interesting, in that it is sandwiched by declarative statements about all the ways in which boys would be judged if they were to wear conventionally feminine clothes in public; yet it makes perfect sense as a tool for safeguarding masculinity.

Conventional masculinity must be viewed as natural, innate, and the foundation upon which all other versions of gender are constructed. Whereas femininity is constructed as an affected gender requiring excessive care dedicated to style and behavior, masculinity constructs itself as the "natural" gender, the baseline that requires no particular effort. Although many students asserted, many times during the unit, that girls are the ones who care about fashion and style and beauty, they are also clearly aware that

masculinity is carefully policed—boys are not "allowed" to wear feminine clothes, not allowed to wear makeup, not allowed to appear too "girly." These rules are as subtle and tacit as are the rules for female-assigned individuals—perhaps more so, since they are so ingrained in students' understanding of the world that they become more difficult to express.

Sylvie cannot fully answer Elly's question; Emily tries again, noting hesitantly that it would be "kind of aw:kward::, and a little: s:trange if you were to see a boy wear a dress or a skirt or high heels, (1.2) or makeup, or tiaras" (lns. 33-35). Elly repeats her question—"Why." (ln. 36)—and I chuckle audibly off-camera. I found it humorous that students were engaging circular reasoning: Boys are not allowed to wear dresses because it would be weird because boys are not allowed to wear dresses because it would be weird.

It continues, with Emily offering her classmate Joshua up as an example: Wouldn't it be weird if one day he came in wearing a dress? Joshua converts this into an opportunity for humor, going into an abbreviated version of "drag" mode as he raises his voice and waves at the class. Light laughter from several students suggests they find his joke funny; from the perspective of conventional masculinity, men in drag is commonly played for laughs. It *cannot* be taken seriously, for to take a man in a dress seriously is to challenge the very system of gender itself.

Chris weighs in, with a tone of consternation in his voice:

51 Chris: Ok, so, (1.2) um, (0.8) I guess I have to say, I wanna say, that I don't
52 know? And I don't think any of us know? The reason? (2.2) It's what we
53 (0.4) always learned? It's like, (1.4) I bet, I, I could like, (1.6) I bet if

scientists studied it, that would be weird if it was like, (2.0) a thing that got put into people's brains. (1.4) I don't know. It's really weird.
Elly: Okay.
Chris: I don't know why. It's like the question of the universe.
Elly: [[It is.]]
[[Why]] do we believe this. Why do we believe that girls should wear this. Where did we learn that, (0.6) [[how did we learn it?]]
Elly: [[Where did it come from,]] right? Where did it come from?

This conversation highlighted a key idea emphasized throughout the trans*literacies unit: That gender is a system we have learned to navigate unquestioningly. Chris offers the frustrated suggestion that if scientists studied beliefs about gender, they might find these beliefs had been placed wholesale inside of individuals' heads—that's how deep, prevalent, and resistant to change the system of gender feels to him.

Ok, so what did they learn?

Gender violation is funny when it is drag; at all other times, it is awkward. It is not clear precisely *why* it is awkward, or why the belief that it is awkward feels so firmly planted in students' heads. I consider this to be a failing of this intervention. I wanted students to emerge from the trans*literacies unit as little gender warriors, intent on disrupting norms and challenging dominant beliefs about gender wherever they saw these beliefs in action. This was an impressive, lofty, and probably naïve goal.

And yet…and yet…and yet I can still identify a small shift, a glimmer of what may come next for some students. I saw it in shifts, not in how students *performed* gender, but in how they understood gender expression to be *perceived* by others. In the pre- and post-assessments, I asked students a direct question about this: How do you think people your age tell whether someone is a boy or a girl?

In order to better understand how students perceived gender being expressed through bodies, I asked them to identify how people like them determined the gender identity of others in order to develop an understanding of what theories they held about what gender is, how it is expressed, and what strategies people use to determine the gender identities of others.

I developed the emergent coding scheme below (Table 8) in order to cluster student responses.

Code	**Description**	**example**
Physical attributes	Identification of innate physical attributes such as voice, body structure, face shape	"Hair length and facial features"
Appearance choices	Identification of clothing or accessory choices, use of color or	"a girl usuly has long hair or a dress or super high shorts and boys usily have skulls on there shirt or butin up shirts"
Behaviors	Identification of activities that can help a person determine the gender identity of another	"wether you go to the girls or boys bathroom"
I don't know / unclear	Responses that were illegible or did not directly respond to the question	"boy"
Ask	Identifying the tactic of inquiring into a person's gender identity.	"we ask"
Societal norms	Focus on how people learn strategies for identifying a person's gender	"I think they find out from pop culture. Also at a very young age sometimes parents can ifluence you."

Table 8: Coding scheme for interpreting student responses about perceiving and attributing gender to others.

As suggested in the table and figure below, student views about perceiving and attributing gender shifted from pre- to post-assessmen (Table 9, Figure 36). Initially, student responses most commonly focused on innate physical traits: body shape, facial structure, and voice; with a smaller number of responses identifying clothing, style, or similar choices about appearance. In the post-assessment, those numbers flipped, with the

most significant focus on appearance choices and a secondary emphasis on innate physical attributes.

n=43	physical attributes	appearance choices	behaviors	IDK / unclear	ask	societal norms	total
preassessment responses	26	14	11	7	4	0	62
postassessment responses	17	24	4	5	6	4	60

Table 9: Count of student responses, clustered into category and divided into pre- and post-assessment.

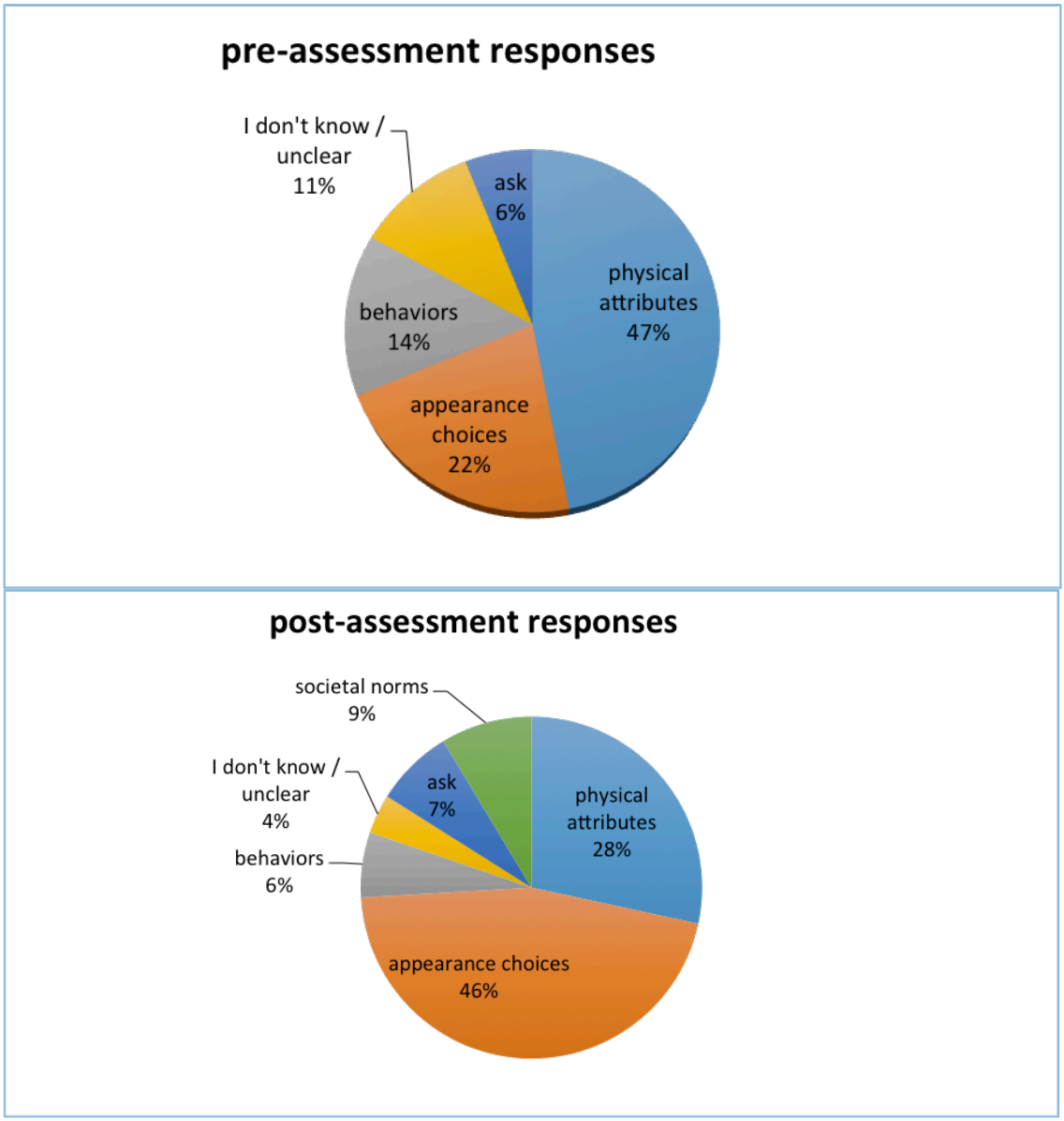


Figure 36: Pie chart illustrating shifts in students' views on perceiving and attributing gender, from pre- to post-assessment.

The shifts that emerged in students' thinking about gender—and their ability and willingness to treat gender as a performance that shifts depending on context—were not quite as dramatic as I had hoped they would be. I believe that this is due in part to the

limited role that performance played in this intervention. If I could refine and re-implement the trans*literacies unit, I would include at least two more performance-based activities: One somewhere in the middle of the unit, when students had developed a stronger sense of the trans* theoretical approach to gender, and once at the conclusion of the unit, to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate how their thinking about gender performance shifted across the unit.

However, the shifts that did emerge in how students theorized gender and articulated the role of external cues such as hair, clothes, and voice were important initial steps, especially for the students who had never before considered gender from this perspective. While students may not have been willing to enlist in the gender war that I envisioned for them, they did emerge from the trans*literacies intervention apparently more aware of the ways in which gender is perceived and acted upon by others. The increased focus on appearance choices in students' explanations of how gender is attributed to people suggests this, and the decreased focus on physical features suggests they not only see the value that people place on clothing and hairstyle but also that these choices trump physical cues of a person's gender.

Chapter Seven
Discussion

I am writing this final chapter of my dissertation less than 24 hours after St. Louis prosecuting attorney Bob McCulloch announced that no charges would be filed against Darren Wilson, the police officer who fired 12 rounds at Michael Brown, an unarmed black man. In his testimony to the grand jury, Wilson compared Brown to Hulk Hogan, said he looked like a "demon," and once referred to Brown as "it":

"And then after he did that, he looked up at me and had the most intense aggressive face. The only way I can describe it, it looks like a demon, that's how angry he looked."

This, as many tweeted in the hours following McCulloch's announcement, is what racism looks like in practice. It is evident not just in Wilson's striking willingness to eradicate Brown's humanity, but also in McCulloch's announcement—a painstaking and excruciating effort to control the official narrative about what happened, in the face of multiple conflicting accounts. In McCulloch's version, Wilson was attacked and Brown was aggressive and scary, coming after Wilson until the final shot blew the top of his head off and he fell finally to the ground. In McCulloch's version, local law enforcement is to be praised for their efforts to maintain peace during a challenging time. In McCulloch's version, those who took to social media to share their outrage, their disappointment, and their fear were the worst offenders of all:

"The most significant challenge encountered in this investigation has been the 24-hour news cycle and its insatiable appetite for something, for anything to talk about, following closely behind with the non-stop rumors on social media."

Others have argued, of course, that the most significant challenge encountered in this investigation was four centuries of systemic, institutionalized racism, embodied in a police officer who drilled a dozen bullets into a brown, weaponless body. Situated in a community in which black people made up 60 percent of the population and 93 percent of all arrests in 2013. This community, it must be noted, is ruled by white people—in this town, the police chief and mayor are white; 50 of its 53 police officers are white; and only one city council member and only one school board member is black. (Levintova, Raja, Simones, & Vicens, 2014).

The story coming out of Ferguson is about race, clearly and truly and deeply. It is also about gender—about performance of masculinity. In the official narrative, Wilson instructed Michael Brown to move out of the center of the road and Michael Brown walked over to Wilson's car and began punching him, then grabbed Wilson's weapon and said "You're too much of a pussy to shoot me."

Wilson demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was not too much of a pussy to shoot Michael Brown. The images of Wilson standing over Michael Brown's dead body prove this yet again: he was not too much of a pussy to respond to force with greater force.

A great deal of beautiful, compelling scholarship has established many of the ways in which social norms about race and gender converge on brown bodies in America (Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Bucholtz, 1999; Cheng, 2008; Epstein, 1998; hooks, 1990). This dissertation, I am deeply disappointed to acknowledge, does not contribute to that important body of work. I believe, as do many of the scholars whose writing undergirds this dissertation, that social structures and identities intersect with each other, and that

those intersections cannot—must not—be ignored. When we choose to focus only on the racial aspects of the Michael Brown case, we overlook all of the ways in which cultural norms about masculinity sent both Michael Brown and Darren Wilson down an increasingly narrow chute with fewer and fewer options. Likewise, when we make claims about how cultural norms about gender shape individuals' perceptions and choices, we cannot pretend these perceptions and choices are not racialized as well. In America, "normal" femininity and masculinity are white, and—while we're at it—middle class, and thin, and non-disabled. To overlook this is to fail to offer a full account of how gender operates across social structures.

I've read a lot of how-to guides for writing discussion chapters. I'm aware that I am not supposed to begin by discussing the limitations of my study. But to ignore my dissertation's biggest weakness—it does not systematically tackle intersectionality—today, the day after a grand jury in Ferguson, Missouri, failed to indict Darren Wilson for the shooting death of Michael Brown—would be to visit another yet another instance of violence on communities who have suffered too many violent acts, for too many years. Future work—my own, others'—aiming to dismantle and reinscribe cultural norms about gender must take intersectionality into account, in order to aid in the project of creating livable spaces for all people inside of all bodies, regardless of their shape, color, geographical location, and insfrastructural surroundings.

All is not lost for this dissertation, however. In the rest of this chapter, I detail some of the implications of my dissertation study—the contributions it aims to make, the impact my findings may have on how we approach gender moving forward. This chapter will end on a personal note—in a section wherein I discuss my relationship to the topic

under study in this dissertation and the role that relationship played in the shaping of the work you've read here.

This dissertation is built around the dual premise that the dominant cultural view of gender is insufficient for accounting for the ways in which gender is experienced and enacted, and that the dominant view of gender is problematic and even harmful because of the ways in which it constrains possibility for action, identity and emotional development, and development of social ties with others. There exist many avenues through which the so-called "normals" view of gender is naturalized, and this dissertation focuses in particular on the transmedia format as a powerful and prevalent form of socialization into gender norms. In doing so, I have aimed to build on prior work exploring how media messages impact how children come to understand the world, and work that explores how critical and creative engagement with media can help learners develop a stronger sense of their agency in resisting and reshaping these narratives.

My study adds an additional element—performance, treated here as a form of gender literacy, in line with queer/trans*theoretical frameworks, and as a form of transmedia literacy, in line with scholars of new media. This dissertation makes an argument that deep, sustained reflection on the ways in which gender operates in our lives requires a fluency with the body as well.

In making this argument, I situate my work within poststructuralist and feminist strands of educational research and within pedagogy-focused strands of queer and transgender studies. My study builds on the empirical work emerging from these fields in two important ways. First, it explicitly adopts a trans*theoretical approach to gender, resisting and challenging the binaristic model that has predominated in gender-focused

research on learning. Most empirical work to date positions itself well within the gender binary. It is not uncommon, for example, to see studies that support girls in deconstructing media messages about femininity without explicitly considering which learners are being counted as "girls"; or to see studies that invite learners to keep a tally that compares number of female characters to the number of male characters on prime time television, without considering how the very act of keeping that tally reinforces dominant values about what counts as "female" or "male." My study takes a different approach. It presumes, based on a large corpus of prior research, that learners in fourth and fifth grade have already internalized the dominant, binaristic view of gender; and it aims at broadening students' frameworks for defining gender, for performing gender, and for critiquing cultural messages about gender. It presumes, following Connell (1987), that social institutions are structured in ways that make gender ideologies relevant in nearly all situations; and that fluency with gender therefore requires an ability to 1) identify, 2) critique, and 3) reinscribe gender norms when existing norms are insufficient for supporting or accounting for people's real, lived experiences.

Although I refer to children throughout this dissertation as female- or male-assigned, in an attempt to honor the reality that all children are assigned but do not choose a gender category, but it is also the case that students took opportunities to identify as the gender they had been assigned. This has been labeled elsewhere as *compulsory cisgenderism* (Lair, 2013), but it is also an expression of identity that must be honored. I made no effort to challenge students when they identified as the gender they were assigned at birth. Instead, I strove to illustrate the many ways in which a seemingly stable and fixed gender identity in fact encompasses a spectrum of gendered identity

positions that exist in tension or outright contradiction with each other. I strove to demonstrate that this was true for all of us, regardless of the gender identity we choose, and to highlight that binaristic models for perceiving, attributing, and performing gender therefore fall short of describing the real and varied gender categories people inhabit in their everyday lives.

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to highlight some of the key findings and implications that have emerged from this study. These are both theoretical and empirical in nature, because this study aims at pushing both the theoretical frameworks of the learning sciences and the empirical and methodological approaches to exploring gender and media with elementary-aged children.

Combining critical, creative, and performative engagement with media

To date, the majority of educational research focusing on gender and/or media literacy has emphasized critical and, increasingly, creative engagement with media messages and platforms. My study adds a third element—performance—which is held by many to be an important skill of new media (e.g., H. Jenkins, Kelley, et al., 2013; H. Jenkins et al., 2009) but which has nonetheless only infrequently been engaged in interventions focused on media literacy (e.g., Halverson, 2010; Husbye, 2013; James, 2009) and even more rarely in interventions addressing gender and gender diversity (e.g., Senelick, 1992). This study suggests that performance is an essential aspect of both media literacy and gender fluency, and that it should be incorporated into interventions designed to support learners in critiquing and challenging dominant cultural beliefs about social structures including gender.

Students participating in my study did not readily see the relationship between the cultural messages they were critiquing when they "did" media literacy activities and the forms of gender they were enacting in their daily lives. That is, gender was largely treated as an abstract concept, one that impacted other people in abstract ways but that played no significant role in their everyday lives. When children were prompted to perform alternative gender identities, however, they not only demonstrated a striking fluency with "adopting alternative identities for improvisation and discovery" (H. Jenkins et al., 2009, p. 47) but also displayed an ability to identify and reflect on the strategies used to perform gender. The tools for performing gender—voice, gesture, and body language—may be in some sense ephemeral but they are no less imbued with historicity, with cultural values and culturally valued uses. Gender norms are not vulnerable to reinscription only through digital and text-based media formats; they are also vulnerable to reinscription through the stories we write with and across our bodies. A curriculum that aims to fosters a fuller literacy with gender and media, therefore, must also include a performative component.

I began the trans*literacies intervention with a performance activity—the Dinner Party, described in greater detail in chapters 3 and 6. In this activity, many students eagerly took on an alternative gender identity and a few students wrote about the experiences of either performing that alternative identity or watching classmates do so. It would have been interesting and instructive to have finished the unit with another performance-based activity and to engage students in a discussion of how people perform alternative gender identities and what resources and culturally shared values and experiences they draw on to do so convincingly. I believe this would have driven home to

students the powerful and important point that we all learn, from a very young age, how to perform gender—that our behaviors our not innate and based in biology, but instead they are learned and honed over time, as bulwarks and turrets, defenses and weaponry that safeguard the heterosexual matrix and the "normals" view of gender that this matrix implies.

Recruiting allies and gender across the curriculum

This dissertation focused on my efforts, in collaboration with Elly and Rick, to design and implement a curriculum that explicitly embraced a trans* theoretical perspective on gender and supported students in engaging with gender diversity using transmedia formats. What was left out of the story I told here was the ways in which Elly and Rick integrated gender-focused inquiry across the curriculum. The trans*literacies unit was not a stand-alone intervention; it was enmeshed in a classroom in which students were constantly and consistently considering gender from multiple perspectives—creative, critical, and performative. A few examples:

In math class, Elly introduced the "bow tie" multiplication method. As part of this lesson, she brought to class dozens of bow ties and invited students to wear them. Both female- and male-assigned students selected bow ties, and many wore them for the remainder of the class session.

One day before the school's winter break was designated "Pajama Day," and students and teachers alike came to school wearing pajamas. On this day, Rick wore a long plaid nightgown. He did not, to my knowledge, justify this decision other than to say he was wearing his favorite pajamas.

Some students were so enthusiastic about the trans*literacies unit that they asked for more time to talk about gender-related issues. Elly invited students to join her and me for lunch conversations over four consecutive school days; more than a dozen students showed up to at least one of these sessions.

Any intervention that takes on deep social issues and injustices must not be treated as a stand-alone unit. What shifts in student thinking I have chronicled here are the consequence not simply of the trans*literacies intervention but also of a classroom environment in which gender was treated as a consistent aspect of social experience. This is important.

Educational research and safeguarding the heterosexual matrix (this section left intentionally blank)

There is, according to trans* theory, a "normal" cluster of gendered identities, gender positions, and gender expressions. These tend to align with dominant beliefs about "normal" men and women, and in K-12 contexts, with dominant beliefs about "normal" girls and boys. In classrooms, male-assigned students are told to stop running and roughhousing and are rewarded for raising their hands, articulating their ideas, and asserting their needs; female-assigned students are told to "be nice" and are rewarded for being polite, respectful, and quiet (Hansot & Tyack, 1988; Martin, 1998). If you've been paying attention up until now, you know why this is problematic—it reflects and reproduces dominant beliefs about how girls and boys, and later men and women, are supposed to interact with the world. This is how children learn to raise the heterosexual matrix—that Foucauldian grid of intelligibility—up against themselves and others. This

is how the "normals" view of gender becomes established in a culture's youngest members.

Educational research writ large is designed to work in support of the heterosexual matrix. We turn on our cameras and wait—hope—for some child to talk, at length, about something interesting. We look for those bodies that move the most, look for conflicts and tensions. We should not, then, be surprised when the data we collect focuses on male-assigned children—children who have been disproportionately encouraged to move, to speak, to act.

I found this to be the case during my data collection—Chris and Joshua, the two male-assigned fifth graders who play prominent roles in my dissertation—spoke the most often, and at the most length, about issues of relevance to my research. They ended up on camera a *lot*. I found myself listening to and transcribing their words a *lot*. Other students—female- and male-assigned—who spoke less eloquently and less frequently were less evident in my video recordings.

A growing body of scholarship in the learning sciences has aimed at pushing the field toward more thoughtful applications of video technology in educational research. The recent edited volume *Video research in the learning sciences* (R. Goldman, Pea, Barron, & Derry, 2007) dedicates nearly 600 pages to advising researchers on a range of strategies for collecting and using video data in a more rigorous manner and pushes readers to remember that, for example, videorecordings are not data but should instead be viewed as data *sources* (Erickson, 2007, p. 153); that video technologies can be used to analyze gesture in addition to discourse (Alibali & Nathan, 2007); and that videography is an aesthetic and poetic form of data collection (Hayes, 2007; Tobin & Hsueh, 2007).

But we must not forget that the video camera, its affordances, and its modern-day narrative and documentary uses were developed according to masculinist, heteronormative value systems (Castle, 2003; Mayer, 2008; Mulvey, 1975). In film studies, one illustration of these value systems is indexed in the "male gaze" (Mulvey, 1975)—a cinematic technique that involves segmenting, sliding across, and objectivying female bodies. The male gaze is so prevalent in contemporary film, music videos, and television, that it has bled into research-focused videography as well (Pink, 2001). This tradition is so enmeshed with the technology that it is too frequently overlooked, even by those who should know better—those few social scientists who have dared to write about queer methodologies have tended to eschew discussion of the video camera altogether. See, for example, the recent volume—to date the only one of its kind—*Queer methods and methodologies: Intersecting queer theories and social science research* (Browne & Nash, 2010). This book tackles the problem of method/methodology but never touches on the problem of technique—videography and video collection strategies are never mentioned in the book's 250 pages.

So: What would it mean to reject the heterosexual matrix, the grid of intelligibility, in the data collection and analysis process? I want to punt the problem of videography, just for a moment, by noting that a queer approach is likely to decenter video in data collection. In my approach to collecting data, I looked elsewhere to listen to what students had to say. I sat with kids as they worked on collages and final projects together, asking them to explain their thinking. I looked at the work they created, looked for their truths in their decisions about how to combine words and images. I watched them as they engaged with each other in school's interstices—between subjects, before school, after

lunch, during dismissal. I located some voices—some, but not all. And should we, indeed, call them "voices"? Why are educators so interested in privileging words, language, speaking, when we know how aligned our language is to dominant and unjust social structures?

Language draws us as researchers; it gives us something to analyze, something to transcribe, something upon which to hang our claims. Perhaps instead of words, of sounds, or noise and action, we would do well to seek out silence and stillness.

My coming-out process was a layered one—I came out first as gay, then queer, then genderqueer, then trans*, then transgender. (Bear with me; I promise this personal anecdote is both short and relevant.) Each coming-out began with paralysis—I had given up "flight" as an option, was not quite to "fight" and was lingering at the third, less well known option, which is to freeze. Each identity encircled its own nugget of issues; at my first coming out, any mention of sexual orientation or sexuality would cause my body to go rigid, my words to fail, my eyes to hood over. Eventually, things shifted toward gender and my reaction would be the same, except around issues of gender identity instead of sexuality. It would be inaccurate to say I've moved past this impulse to freeze in the years since I first came out, that first time; more accurate to say I've learned strategies to get myself unstuck. Can a video camera capture that moment of stuckness, that defense mechanism that kept me safely closeted for 30 years? If my friends, family, therapists, and my own inner self were unable to see what was "really" going on, how can any educational researcher presume to say they, armed with only a video camera and self-assurance, could do better?

I have been looking back through my video corpus, looking for moments of stillness and silence, looking for frozenness and lack of language, of gesture. These moments are difficult to find—I've been well trained to seek instead moments of positive action: words, gestures, and gaze. As I close down the final pages of my dissertation, I see yet another story emerging from this corpus—one of gaps, lacks, of what Halberstam (2008) refers to as "patently queer forms of negative knowing" (p. 141). When during a whole-class discussion on gender norms in television commercials, a child is instructed to stop drawing in his notebook and to put it away, he shuts the notebook and sits stock-still in his place on the floor. He neither registers the conversation in his body language nor contributes to it in any recognizable way. Another child looks down at her pant leg during two different class discussions—is she bored? Is she frozen? What forms of discourse, of action, of *in*action, would draw her close? What if she never unsticks? Must we consider this a failure, a story not worth telling?

The future work of research on queer and trans* issues in education is to peel back these layers too—the layers of method, of technique. We must develop strategies for embracing queer ways of knowing—in our teaching as in our research, in our approaches to data collection as in our reportage.

It's time for the Learning Sciences to embrace Queer and Trans* Theory

As Pinar (1998) notes, educational research is a "highly conservative and often reactionary field" (p. 2). This is in some ways even more true of the field of the Learning Sciences, which makes no bones about emerging in response to so-called "instructionist" (Papert, 1980; Sawyer, 2006b) approaches to teaching and learning, and in response to

the cognitivist views of learning that came to dominate educational psychology in the mid- to late-20th Century (S. Barab & Squire, 2004). Indeed, the opening chapter of *The Cambridge Handbook of the Learning Sciences* (Sawyer, 2006a) notes that "[s]ince the beginning of the modern institution of schools, there has been debate about whether education is a science or an art" (p. 15) and then goes on to place the Learning Sciences firmly on the "science" side of the debate. The commitment within the Learning Sciences to putting forth a "new science of learning" is evident in the prevalence of positivist and post-positivist frameworks among the most prominent Learning Sciences-focused journals and edited volumes. Even the increasing popularity of sociocultural theories of learning have only just barely approached the cliff that overlooks the postmodern, but to date no learning scientist has taken that leap.

No article ever published in the *Journal of the Learning Sciences* has included the word "queer" anywhere in its title, keywords, or body. None have used any of the following the terms: "homosexual," "heterosexual," "LGBT," or "transgender." Six articles have cited Foucault, known to many as the, er, father of post-structuralism (Packer, 2001; Randall, 2000; Sfard, 2002, 2007; van Oers, 2002; Vosniadou, Pagondiotis, & Deliyianni, 2005); but none have cited Judith Butler, known as a foundational thinker in poststructuralist gender theory. It seems, these days, that *JLS* is nearly the only education-focused journal that has not devoted any space to issues of sexual and gender identity and to the post-structuralist theories that aim to theorize the role of those identity categories in learning.

As I hope I have shown throughout this dissertation, educational research that addresses gender stands to gain a great deal by expanding its framework for defining and

interpreting this category of human life. It is not simply that educational research must develop strategies to account for the increasing number of learners who identify as gendervariant, genderqueer, and transgender—although for goodness' sake, that would be a nice start—but also that predominant theories of gender and learning fail to account for the variety of ways in which people experiences and express gender in their everyday lives. Queer and trans* theory offer alternative frameworks to the dominant, binaristic model of gender that has been accepted largely without question within the Learning Sciences. These alternative frameworks come with alternative epistemological and ontological commitments—commitments that have not yet been seriously considered within the field but that stand to expand contemporary theories of learning and cognition in important and dramatic ways.

But enough about you; let's talk about me.

The guiding principles of many dominant threads within the learning sciences are directly anathema to those driving queer and trans* studies. The learning sciences has what queer theory would characterize as an embarrassing tendency to fetishize validity, reliability, and generalizability (S. Barab & Squire, 2004; Derry et al., 2010; Patel, Yoskowitz, & Arocha, 2009; Pellegrino, 2009); it aims for "rigorous" and "scientifically sound" approaches to theorizing, designing, and capturing learning in context (Bell, 2004; Sawyer, 2006b).

Welcome to the new motherfucking boss, shouts queer theory in its fury, *same as the old goddam motherfucking boss.* Queer and trans* theory worship at a different altar; they reject the epistemological commitments that privilege "scientific" models and argue

for alternative frameworks that create room for other ways of knowing, other forms of being.

Well. I have detailed the epistemological tensions between queer theory and the learning sciences elsewhere in this dissertation. What I want to do here is only to state how queer it is for a body like mine to find itself working in a discipline that, so far, has ignored, challenged, and rejected outright its existence. How queer it is, and how excruciating. Trauma is visited upon queer bodies at all occasions, and not least among these for me was having to live through half a decade of being made aware, both explicitly and tacitly, that while my existence and my experiences matter to *some* branches of education, they did not matter to the learning sciences. When I made the decision to pursue queer work, I was told by some senior learning scientists that I would make myself unemployable. The message: If you work on the issues that help you, and others like you, survive a system that does not want you, this field too will not want you. When I announced that I would be drawing on queer theory to frame my dissertation, I learned that I would need to offer twice the justification, and be four times as knowledgeable, as any of my peers. The message: Your theory of survival does not inherently matter, and we will not extend a hand unless you can first prove that we should. Certainly these reactions were not universal, and I was lucky to have some advocates helping me along the way—but fighting to create space for my theories, my experiences, within my adopted field was far more difficult and painful than I could have wished.

It was from within the folds of this affective labor that I embarked on my dissertation study. The fourth and fifth graders who worked with me had no interest in

expounding on my career potential, had no interest in waiting for me to justify my work to them. It was, briefly, a relief and a respite.

This is not to say that my struggles with my queer body and trans* identity were at rest during my time in the classroom, however. If anything, my conflicts with how to perform myself moved into what Star (1990) referred to as a "high tension zone." I wanted to be recognized by anyone who was paying close enough attention as someone who was queer/trans*. I wanted to use my body in a way that aligned with the commitments driving my study; that is, I wanted to perform my identity/ies in a way that embraced the principle that gender is an outcome of societal norms and local instantiations of those norms interacting with a person's physical characteristics. Yet I also wanted access to my research site, and did not want to seem too controversial to stakeholders who could prevent my entry. Further, my queer and trans identities were in flux—shifting, fluid, lacking form, as queer and trans* theory proclaim all identities are wont to be. I chose to use my birth name—this classroom has become one of the last physical spaces where that name is still in use for me—and to use female pronouns. To balance this, I went full-on trans elsewhere: I kept my hair cut very short and wore compression shirts every day and sometimes packed beneath my most masculine clothes.

Did I think I had succeeded in counteracting years of socialization into gender norms?

Research suggests that it takes four feminine features in order for a person to be perceived by others as female (Bornstein, 1994; Kessler & McKenna, 1978); this explains why women are far more commonly perceived as men than vice versa. My overt feminine traits—my given name, body size, facial structure, and voice—offer apparently

incontrovertible evidence that I am a girl: Although I am frequently taken as male in initial public encounters, I am also commonly the recipient of an apology from whoever it is who "mistook" me for a male in the first place.

Certainly the 4th and 5th graders at my research site had no problem perceiving me as female. As students engaged in gender-related projects, male students frequently asked for my advice on "girl" aspects of a topic, while female students sought confirmation about their experiences as girls. I assume that this perception of me was driven in large part by my decision to introduce myself as "Jenna," not "Jake," and to be referred to using feminine pronouns, although it became clear throughout my study that many students perceived me as "innately" female despite the choices I had made about my appearance. For example, one day as I was helping students complete their projects in which they envisioned how gender norms would shift in the future, two overlapping reminders of students' acceptance of me as a girl occurred. A male student, working on a project on gender and superheroes, called me over.

"I need your help coming up with girl superhero names," he said. I asked him why he thought I could help. "You're a girl," he said with the slight smile he commonly wore when talking to me. "I know you have girl names rattling around up there."

My struggle over how best to respond was interrupted when Joshua, a student with whom I had worked very closely throughout the intervention, got my attention to show me work he was completing with a peer:

"Hey, Mom—I mean, Jenna—listen to this idea we had about anime."

The examples above suggest that students not only followed my lead, agreeing to treat me as the gender by which I identified, but also saw me as "innately" female, from inside to out. Even my brain was female; even my nature was maternal.

This dissertation, then, is an effort to build spaces not only for others to live freely as the identities they want to inhabit but also for me, myself, to be recognized in the identities I've chosen for myself. My body, my identities, my interactions with students and teachers, were as much a part of this study as were the books and commercials and writing prompts that I have discussed throughout this dissertation. Those interactions, those identities, were less present in the preceding pages than I believe now they should have been—chalk it up, perhaps, to the emotional labor of the everyday. A body gets tired of fighting, tired of justifying, tired of proving they belong; could I sustain the effort of justifying my body's presence here, too, in this dissertation?

Maybe I was too tired. Maybe I was fed up. Maybe I'd heard too many people say, too many times and in too many ways, that my body and my politics had no place in the learning sciences. Maybe I listened to that voice that told me my experiences weren't valuable, weren't interesting, weren't valid. For whatever reason, I took my body and my identities out.

It is my work—it is the work of all of us who engage in scholarship that is intensely personal, intensely political, intensely linked to creating identity and justice and empathy—to undertake the work of putting myself back in.

Appendices

Appendix A: Key terms

This dissertation draws on poststructuralist and queer and trans*theoretical frameworks for understanding and communicating about gender. In writing about gender from this perspective, I employ terminology that is not common either in everyday use or in the vast majority of gender-focused scholarship and publications. I therefore offer a guide to some of the key terms that will be used in this dissertation to refer to gender, gender identity, and the social structures surrounding gender.

Transgender: The term "transgender" is the generally preferred term for any individual who identifies as a different gender from the one they were assigned at birth.

Transsexual: The term for any transgender individual who has accessed medical support for transitioning into their chosen gender identity.

Trans*: A term used to encompass the range, or "spectrum," of non-cisgender identities that individuals may embrace. This term is commonly used to refer to transgender and transsexual individuals as well as those who identify as genderqueer, gender nonconforming, transmasculine/transfeminine, androgynous, and gender neutral. In general, the dissertation uses the term trans* to capture this variety of identity possibilities, and only uses the term transgender for those who have overtly identified as such.

Cisgender / cis: The term "cisgender" is coming into increased usage as a means of identifying individuals who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Cisnormativity: the assumption that "all people are cissexual, that those assigned male at birth always grow up to be men and those assigned female at birth always grow up to be women" (Bauer et al., 2009, p. 356).

Female-assigned, male-assigned: When possible, I use the terms "female/male assigned" to refer to the children who participated in my study. This is both to note their marked gender in the classroom and to grant that they may not currently, or may not in the future, identify with the gender they have been assigned. I also use this terminology to refer to any individual who has not overtly expressed a gender identity to me.

Female-identified / male-identified: I use the terms female/male identified" to refer to individuals who have overtly expressed a gender identity to me. Both of the teachers in whose classroom I completed my study overtly identified as female (Elly) or male (Rick), and some other individuals involved in the study also expressly identified their gender identity to me.

Gendervariant: A term used to describe individuals who vary from social norms about gender identity and expression, as well as cultural artifacts or texts that vary from social norms about gender. For example, the manga series *Ranma ½* (Takahashi, 2001) is a gendervariant narrative because one of the protagonists magically switches their gender presentation at various points in the story; a male-identified person wearing makeup is engaging in gendervariant behavior.

Singular they: The English language does not have a commonly used gender-neutral pronoun. I therefore employ the "singular they," an increasingly commonly used mode of creating gender neutrality where none currently exists. And I don't want

to hear any guff about how much it hurts your grammar sensibilities, either. You know what hurts *my* sensibilities? Hearing people treat grammar "rules" like they are more important than respect for individuals' gender identities.

Appendix B: Curricular materials

The materials that were used during the trans*literacies intervention are included in this appendix.

Dinner Party Activity: Story Writing Worksheet
Important Life Event Story

*Write a page long story about an important event that has happened to you in your life.

Dinner Party Activity: Post-Activity Reflection

Name _____ Group _____

Dinner Party Reflection

How did this activity push your thinking about drama/performance?

How did this activity push your thinking about gender?

Make a sketch that represents this activity:

Gender Pre-Assessment Worksheet

Name:_____ Date:_____

1. What does the term gender mean to you? Please explain:

2. How do you think people your age figure out whether someone is a boy or a girl?

3. Do you think there are differences in how boys and girls think? Why or why not? What examples can you give?

4. Do you think girls and boys are equal?

5. What privileges do boys have that girls don't have? What privileges do girls have that boys don't have?

6. Do you think parents and teachers treat boys and girls equally? Why or why not?

7. Do most boys and girls have to follow the same rules at home or not? Are chores the same?

8. Are there any unwritten "rules" for boys and girls?

9. In what ways can popular culture (TV, movies, music, clothes, advertising) affect people's ideas about what it means to be a boy or girl?

10. What TV shows, movies, music, clothes, and advertising do you think most affect the ideas that people your age have about what it means to be a boy or girl?

11. How do advertisers reach kids?

Legos Commercial Trace: Media Analysis Worksheet

Names: _____

MEDIA ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Instructions: Choose one of the commercials from the list below and answer the questions.

1. 1955: Black and white commercial with a boy and a girl http://youtu.be/C1gmrgnYD5A
2. 1973: Two children building a bridge, helicopter, ambulance, tow truck http://youtu.be/U5u0Hmkh1JM
3. 1970s: young child and older sibling playing with Legos http://youtu.be/JvkiDkMGDqg
4. 1980s: Zack the Lego maniac: http://youtu.be/pDH3AoOQzE0
5. 1991: Pirate legomaniac http://youtu.be/7eFNaloQWsY
6. 1993: Ice Planet Legomaniac commercial http://youtu.be/BvUhaMnTuPk

1. Media messages

a) Who do you think made up this message?

b) Who is the audience of this message?

c) Why did someone make up this message?

d) What does this message do to try to attract your attention?

2. Media involves representations of reality.

a) How is the commercial realistic?

b) What is telling you about boys and girls?

c) What opinions about gender are being expressed?

d) What opinions/representations about gender are NOT being expressed?

3. Individuals interpret media messages and create their own meaning based on personal experience.

a) How do you relate to this commercial?

b) How might someone else understand this message differently?

4. Media messages reflect cultural beliefs and change over time.
a) What does this message tell you about the cultural beliefs about gender that existed when it was created?

b) What cultural beliefs do you think have changed since this message was created?

c) How do you think today's audience would feel about this message?

5) Media educates kids.
a) What stereotypical definition of gender is made up by TV shows, movies & music? Give an example of a TV show, movie, or song, that you think 'defines' gender?

b) What definition of gender *should* media be teaching kids? Give an example of a TV show, movie, or song, that you think 'defines' gender in the way you feel it should be.

Invitations Information Sheets

Invitation: A World Without Gender

In class, we've talked a lot about how gender stereotypes limit us in lots of ways. We've talked about how popular culture tells us the "rules" of being a boy or a girl, and we've talked about why those rules could hurt us. This invitation asks you to consider what the world would be like if there was no such thing as gender. How would we live differently or the same? What rules and expectations would there be, if gender didn't exist? How would we name our children, decide what clothes and toys to buy, help them choose a career, and teach them how to make friends?

The materials that come with this invitation include a news story about a Canadian couple that decided to raise their child without identifying the child as a boy or a girl, and a children's book called "My Princess Boy." As you examine these materials, consider the following questions:

1. Is a "world without gender" possible? Why or why not?
2. What would the world be like if we didn't know the gender of other people? What would it be like to not have a gender ourselves?
3. In what ways would life be easier or harder if nobody had a gender? What do you think would change, and why?
4. How would school, family, sports, media, popular culture, and other aspects of culture be different in a world without gender?

Invitation: Names

Read through the resources included in this invitation. Consider the following questions as you read:

1. What are the origins of names?

2. How do our names lead others to make assumptions about our gender, race, and nationality? What are the benefits and drawbacks of these assumptions?

3. What historical meanings do names carry with them?

4. How do our names help us to understand ourselves?

5. What might it be like to take a different name?

Reflection/Product: Develop a collage, drawing, or poem that represents your name.

Invitation: Superheroes

What are superheroes, and how are they different from "ordinary" people? What physical, mental, and emotional characteristics make someone a superhero? What groups of people do superheroes represent? What kind of person is a superhero? Who gets to be a superheroes? How do superheroes feel about themselves? Are we afraid of superheroes? Are superheroes freaks?

Take a look at the materials provided as part of this invitation. These materials offer examples of some popular superheroes. As you browse through these materials and reflect on the role of superheroes in our culture, you might consider the following:

gender	Are the images of superheroes usually male or female? What differences do you notice between the way male and female superheroes are portrayed? (Think about clothing, hairstyle, personality traits, backstory, etc.) Who is often the victim that needs to be saved in the storyline and who is the hero?
race	What race do you see most commonly represented, and what races are underrepresented?
ability	Do you see examples of superheroes with disabilities?
age	Are the elderly ever portrayed as superheroes? Are children ever portrayed as superheroes?
body type	What does a male superhero look like? What does a female superhero look like? What physical traits do male and female superheroes rely on, and how are these traits similar or different?

Invitation: What are boys and girls made of?

What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails, and puppy dogs tails
That's what little boys are made of.
What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice and all things nice
That's what little girls are made of.

The poem above is a nursery rhyme that a lot of people think doesn't really represent what today's boys and girls are *really* made of. For this activity, you'll "talk back" to the poem by creating your own version of what boys and girls are made of, using the materials provided. You can be as creative as you want, as long as your final product tells something about how your group understands boys and girls. There's just one rule: **You can't use any pictures of faces in your collage!**

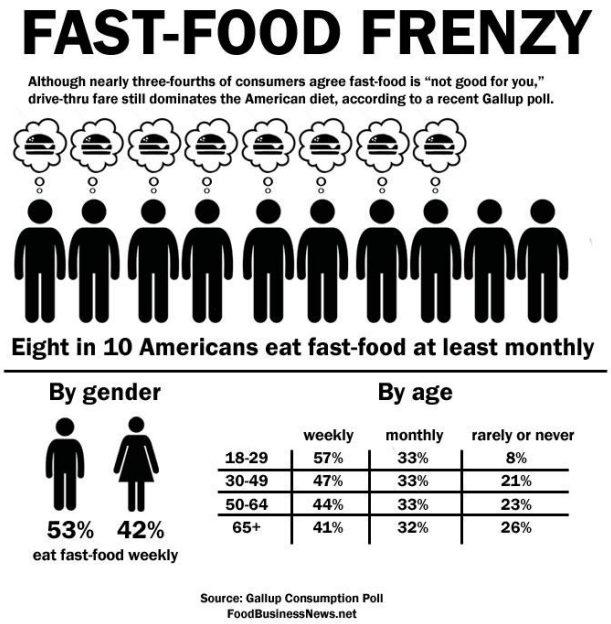
Here are some things to think about that may help you build your collage:

- colors
- objects
- words
- brands and logos
- symbols

Invitation: Fast Food Nation

Here's how the online encyclopedia Wikipedia defines "fast food":

Fast food is the term given to food that can be prepared and served very quickly, first popularized in the 1950s in the United States. While any meal with low preparation time can be considered to be fast food, typically the term refers to food sold in a restaurant or store with preheated or precooked ingredients, and served to the customer in a packaged form for take-out/take-away. Fast food restaurants are traditionally separated by their ability to serve food via a drive-through. The term "fast food" was recognized in a dictionary by Merriam–Webster in 1951.



Outlets may be stands or kiosks, which may provide no shelter or seating,or fast food restaurants (also known as *quick service restaurants*). Franchise operations which are part of restaurant chains have standardized foodstuffs shipped to each restaurant from central locations.

Fast food is everywhere. It's popular, and it's controversial. Fast food companies have been accused of causing unhealthy eating habits, but on the other hand, fast food is easy to find and cheap.

We invite you to explore the role of fast food in American culture, by looking at materials that describe the nutritional value of fast food, the role of fast food companies in changing how we eat, and the role these companies play in "branding" a culture. As you review these materials, you might consider the following questions:

1. If it's so obvious that fast food is unhealthy, why is it so popular?
2. Why are there differences in fast food consumption by gender and age?
3. Who benefits most from fast food companies like McDonald's, and why? Who is hurt

most by these companies?
4. What do you think about fast food companies' decision to sell kids' meals that include toys?
5. Why do kids' meals come in "boy" and "girl" versions?
6. What would a world without fast food look like?

Invitation: The Monster Under My Bed

Monsters play an important role in our culture. They teach us lessons about what to fear and how to be good. They often symbolize important social problems or fears. For example, the Japanese monster Godzilla (pictured below) was first featured in film in 1954, less than 10 years after World War II and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Godzilla's back story is that he was an undersea creature who was awakened and made enormous and ferocious because of nuclear radiation. Godzilla symbolized people's fear that nuclear weapons were out of society's control and that these weapons could destroy us.

Take a look at the materials included in this information. The materials describe some kinds of monsters that are common in movies and on TV. As you browse through these materials, you might think about the following questions:

1. Why do some monsters keep making comebacks?
2. Does a monster's symbolism stay stable, or does it change over time?
3. Why are some monsters fast and others slow? Why do some monsters awaken at night, while some prowl during the day?
4. What gender and race are most American monsters? Why?
5. What monsters might represent *your* fears, or the fears of people who have shared your experiences?
6. What new monsters might represent today's cultural fears?

Invitation: Board Books

Board books are meant for kids ages 0-5. We read these books to teach young kids things about the world. Read through the board books included in this invitations. Consider the following questions as you read:

1. What are the books about? Who is in them? What are the characters doing?
2. What is the purpose of these particular books? What lessons do they teach?
3. How do they teach children about what kind of people they can be?
4. What can you learn from reading these books?
5. What lessons should kids learn?
6. How does reading shape who you are?
7. What is something you wish you knew when you were a young child? What's missing from these books?
8. What stories are not included in the selection of books included in this invitations? What other stories need to be told?

Reflection/Product: Draw a picture for a lesson you'd like to teach your book buddy or another young child you know.

Invitation: The Origins of Color and Meanings

It's no coincidence that most of America thinks of pink as a 'girly' color and blue as a 'boy' color. Media messages about colors teach us to associate colors with certain genders, feelings, and experiences. Read through the resources included in this invitations and consider the following questions:

1. What are the origins of 'girl' colors and 'boy' colors? What *are* the colors we associate with girls and with boys?

2. Are there 'good' colors and 'bad' colors?
    a. Villains/bad guys are usually represented by which colors?
    b. Protagonists/good guys are usually represented by which colors?

3. What do colors represent?

4. Why do colors have meanings?
    a. Where do these meanings come from?

5. Do colors have to mean the same thing all the time?
6. What would it be like if we could 'start over' and choose new colors to represent feelings, experiences, and genders?

Reflection/Product: Write a 'new' color dictionary for 2-4 colors, giving those colors new meanings. Justify your choices!

Invitation: Love Stories and Happily Ever After

So many stories that we read, movies we watch, songs on the radio, and other media tell us that the ending to every love story is happy. Especially in fairy tales, we read about how two people find love and romance and the rest of their life is perfect. We wonder - is life really like a 'happily ever after' ending? After you look through the materials in this invitations, consider the following questions.

1. How are love stories "supposed" to go? What role does the "happily ever after" part of the story play?

2. What is the origin of our beliefs about romance and "happily ever after"?

3. Do you think that happily ever after is possible in real life? How should it go?

4. How long is happily ever after?

5. Is happily ever after at the expense of someone being unhappy?

6. What influence has Disney had on how we think about love stories?

7. How are princess stories different or the same?

8. Compare/contrast disney to an original fairy tale.

Reflection/Product: Write, draw, create, a story with an ending you consider to be 'how the story should go.'


THEDISNEYPRINCESS.TUMBLR.COM


Disney
Happily
Ever
After


And
they lived
happily ever after

Invitation: Dr. Seuss

Read through the resources included in this invitations. Consider the following questions as you read:

1. What statements do you think Dr. Seuss is trying to make?
2. How does Dr. Seuss deliver the message?
3. How do these statements connect to you?
4. How do these statements connect to other literature you've read?
5. What do you take away from these books?
6. When you read these, what do you find yourself thinking about?

Reflection/Product: Write a book in the style of Dr. Seuss.

Invitation: Party Supplies

When the time comes for you to have a birthday party - have you noticed how the party store separates the *kinds* of parties that you can have? Go to **portaportal.com/tps45** and follow the links under the 'party supplies invitations' box. You should also look at the resources in the folder when thinking about these questions:

1. What are the categories of parties at these stores?

2. Why does Party City separate party ideas into boys and girls?

3. How do you decide what kind of party **you** want to have?
    a. Who helps you make these choices?

4. Are there types of parties you would not be able to have?

5. In general, how do peers and parents influence the party theme?

6. Why are parties celebrity and/or character themed?

Reflection/Product: Design your ideal birthday party. Would there be a theme? How does it relate to themes you are "allowed" to have?

Invitation: Toy Sections

Toy sections are categorized by many groups: race cars, dolls, pink, blue, big kids, small kids, board games, books. Look at the pictures and books included in this invitation. Consider the following questions as you read:

1. What differences do you see between the Swedish toy store and the United States toy store?

2. Why is the toy section arranged in specific ways? How are these choices made?

3. Do toys belong in specific categories - what might those categories be?

4. Are there “girls toys” and “boys toys”? Why are toys put into “girl toys” and “boy toys’ categories sometimes?

5. Where do stereotypes about gender come from?

6. Why do toy stores exist? How do they teach kids about possibilities for their life?

Reflection/Product: Create a blueprint for a toy store, telling how you would like the toys to be sorted.

Invitation: Inventors

Read through the resources included in this invitations. Consider the following questions as you read:

1. What is an “inventor” ?

2. Who is an inventor you had never heard of?

3. Who gets credit for inventions?

4. Why do some people not get credit for inventions?

5. How do inventions influence your life?

6. Why do inventions shape our family culture? Why do they change the way people behave in the United States?

7. Do you think anyone can be an inventor? Why or why not? What does it take to be an inventor?

Reflection/Product: Think of a product you want, draw the product and the person who invented it. Then answer the questions below.

- What did the person look like?
- Did they look like the people in the books you were reading?
- Are they the same or different than you?

Invitation: Hunger Games

Consider the following questions:

1. What are the roles of the characters in the Hunger Games?
2. How are their personalities the same or different?
3. How is the world created similar to/different from our own?
4. What is realistic, what is fantasy?
5. How do the characters embody different emotions? (ex: bravery)
6. When did the Capitol go too far?
7. Where do authors get their stories? Do they come from real life?
8. How are violence and entertainment related?

Reflection/Product: Compose a prologue or epilogue from the perspective of Katniss or any of the other characters.

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Curriculum Vitae

Education

PhD Learning Sciences, Indiana University (2015)
Dissertation: Trans*literacies: Designing for Gender Fluency and Transmedia Literacy in the Elementary Classroom
Dissertation Chair: Joshua A. Danish
MFA Creative Writing, Colorado State University (May 2005)
BA English, Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI (1999)

Research interests: new media literacies and participatory cultures, literacy studies, transmedia theory, cultural-historical activity theory, transgender studies, LGBTQ issues in education, feminist and queer theory and pedagogies, poststructuralist methodologies

Research Experience

August 2014-present: *Postdoctoral Researcher, Learning Ethnographies of New Engineers Project, University of Colorado Boulder*. *Principal Investigator: Kevin O'Connor.* Responsibilities include designing interview and data collection protocols, participating in grant proposals and semi-annual reports to funders; and collecting, managing, and analyzing data collected at a variety of educational and workplace engineering environments.

2011-2012: *Research Associate, StudentNet Project, Indiana University*. *Faculty advisor: Joshua A. Danish*. Participated in drafting literature review and grant proposal; developed research and interview protocol; drafted and submitted IRB application; organized data collection in high school English classroom; collaborated with participating teacher on development of curricular materials.

May-August 2012: *Researcher, Center for Evaluation & Education Policy (CEEP), Indiana University. Principal Investigator: Jonathan Plucker.* Conducted research on a variety of education-related issues; completed literature reviews on issues of educational policy, creativity, and talent development; completed meta-analyses of educational intervention approaches; drafted and revised scholarly articles and press releases.

2009-2011: *Graduate Research Associate, Participatory Assessment Project, Indiana University*. *Faculty advisor: Daniel T. Hickey.* Participated in data collection; collaborated with participating teachers on development of curricular materials;

participated in writing papers and delivering presentations; helped to develop interactive websites to showcase project work.

2009-2010: *Research Consultant, SociaLens, Bloomington, IN.* Completed and presented a case study of social media use of a local co-operative supermarket. Developed assessment measures to interpret employee proficiency with and aptitude for social media tools.

2007-2009: *Researcher and Curriculum Specialist, Project New Media Literacies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology*. *Principal Investigator: Henry Jenkins.* Led development of a curriculum for use in the high school English classroom; conducted observations and collected field notes from seven schools piloting material from this curriculum; collaborated with members of Harvard's GoodPlay Project on design and development of an Ethics Casebook for use in junior high and high school classrooms.

Publications

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

McWilliams, J., & Plucker, J. (2014). Brain cancer, meat glue, and shifting models of outstanding student behavior: Smart contexts for the 21st Century. *Talent Development and Excellence, 6*(1).

Yi, X., Hu, W., Plucker, J, & **McWilliams, J.** (2013). Is there a developmental slump in creativity in China? The relationship between organizational climate and creativity development in Chinese adolescents. *The Journal of Creative Behavior, 47*(1).

McWilliams, J., Hickey, D.T., Hines, M.B., Conner, J.M., & Bishop, S.C. (2012). Using collaborative writing tools for literary analysis: Twitter, fan fiction and The Crucible in the secondary English classroom. *Journal of Media Literacy Education.*

Hickey, D.T., Honeyford, M.A., & **McWilliams, J.** (2011). Reading Moby-Dick in a participatory culture: Organizing assessment for engagement in a new media era. *Journal of Educational Computing Research, 45*(2), Special Issue: Young people, Learning and Social Media.

Books

Jenkins, H., & Kelley, W., with Clinton, K., **McWilliams, J.,** & Reilly, E. (2013). *Reading in a participatory culture: Remixing Moby-Dick in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Book chapters

McWilliams, J. (2014). Queering educational research and the politics of 'conservatively queer': Sexmuteness in American public schools. In G. Walton (Ed.), *The Gay Agenda: Creating Space, Identity, and Justice.* New York: Peter Lang.

McWilliams, J. (2013). Lessons from a classroom participatory culture. In H. Jenkins & W. Kelley (Eds.), *Reading in a participatory culture: Remixing Moby-Dick in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

McWilliams J., & Clinton, K. (2013). Reimagining and reinventing the English classroom for the digital age. In H. Jenkins & W. Kelley (Eds.), *Reading in a participatory culture: Remixing Moby-Dick in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Clinton, K., Jenkins, H., & **McWilliams, J.** (2013). New literacies in an age of participatory culture. In H. Jenkins & W. Kelley (Eds.), *Reading in a participatory culture: Remixing Moby-Dick in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Kelley, W., Jenkins, H., Clinton, K., & **McWilliams, J.** (2013). From theory to practice: Building a "community of readers" in your classroom. In H. Jenkins & W. Kelley (Eds.), *Reading in a participatory culture: Remixing Moby-Dick in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hickey, D.T., Honeyford, M.A., & **McWilliams, J.** (2013). Participatory assessment in a climate of accountability. In H. Jenkins & W. Kelley (Eds.), *Reading in a participatory culture: Remixing Moby-Dick in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

The Janissary Collective: Blank, P., Brown, W., Deuze, M., Ems, L., Lewis, N., **McWilliams, J.,** & Speers, L. (2013). Participatory culture and media life: Approaching freedom. In A. Delwiche & J. Hudson (Eds.), *The participatory cultures handbook.* New York: Routledge.

Hickey, D. T., Honeyford, M. A., Clinton, K. A., & **McWilliams, J.** (2010). Participatory assessment of 21st century proficiencies. In V. Shute & B. Becker (Eds.), *Innovative assessment in the 21st century: Supporting educational needs.* New York: Springer.

Book reviews

McWilliams, J. (2013). Review of *Decoding liberation: The promise of free and open source software*, by Samir Chopra and Scott Dexter. *The Information Society, 29*(4).

McWilliams, J. (2011, May 16). The Kids are Alright: a review of *Hanging out, messing around, and geeking out: Kids living and learning with new media*, by Mizuko Ito, Sonja Baumer, Matteo Bittanti, danah boyd, Rachel Cody, Becky Herr-Stephenson, Heather A. Horst, Patricia G. Lange, Dilan Mahendran, Katynka Z.

Martinez, C. J. Pascoe, Dan Perkel, Laura Robinson, Christo Sims, and Lisa Tripp. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 18*(4).

McWilliams, J. (2009). Book Review: 'Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology,' by Allan Collins and Richard Halverson. *eLearn Magazine*. November 17, 2009. Published online at http://elearnmag.org/subpage.cfm?section=reviews&article=11-1.

McWilliams, J. (2009). Book review: *Teaching the New Writing: Technology, change, and assessment in the 21st-century classroom*. *THEN: Technologies, Humanities, Education, Narrative.* June 15, 2009. Published online at http://thenjournal.org/review/234/.

Presentations and Interviews

Conference Presentations

McWilliams, J. (April 2014). 'Queer behind the camera: The secret life of the queer educational researcher.' In symposium: "Disrupting 'safe spaces' with queer bodies: Exploring perceptions of safety and vulnerability as teachers and researchers." AERA Annual meeting 2014: Philadelphia, PA.

McWilliams, J., Danish, J., & Keene, J. (April 2013). 'I Hate That Word Savage / Don't Mind If You Use It': Exploring the 'Safe Space' Construct. AERA Annual Meeting 2013: San Francisco, CA.

McWilliams, J. (April 2012). *Silence at the Intersection: Essentialism and Truncation of Experience.* AERA Annual Meeting 2012, Vancouver, BC.

McWilliams, J. (March 2012). "I would just stop that shit": When kids question the world of the story they've been written into. *Thoughts from DML's Emerging Scholars: Findings and Insights from Early Career Researchers, Developers, and Practitioners*. *Digital Media & Learning Conference 2012*, San Francisco, CA.

Hickey, D.T., **McWilliams**, J., Bishop, S., & Soylu, F. (April 2011). *Participatory Assessment for Engagement, Understanding, and Achievement in Online Learning Contexts*. AERA Annual Meeting 2011, New Orleans, LA.

McWilliams, J. (March 2011). *On the question of democracy and empowerment*. Presentation for symposium: Participatory Culture Reconsidered: Moving Beyond Rainbows, Unicorns and Butterflies. Digital Media & Learning Conference, Long Beach, CA.

Hickey, D.T., **McWilliams, J**., & Bishop, S. (Nov. 2010). Participatory Assessment for Engagement, Understanding, and Achievement. Presentation for *Faculty Research Seminar*, Office of Research and Development, Indiana University School of Education.

McWilliams, J. (Oct. 28 2010). When we tell kids they can make a difference…and we're wrong. *Disembodied citizens and communities: How new technologies are changing how students learn, collaborate and construct civic identities*, panel for the International Association for Research of Service Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE).

McWilliams, J., Baechtold, T., & Finn, G. (Oct. 8, 2010.) Today's writing is social, collaborative, and multimodal—so how do we grade it? *Roundtable discussion for the Indiana Teachers of Writing Annual Conference,* Indianapolis, IN.

Clinton, K.A., & **McWilliams, J.** (April 2010). *A Model for Reading in a Participatory Culture.* AERA Annual Meeting 2010, Denver, CO.

Hickey, D.T., Honeyford, M.A., & **McWilliams, J**. (April 2010). *Participatory Assessment: Remediating Curriculum and Testing for the 21st Century*. AERA Presentation.

Honeyford, M., Rupert, R., & **McWilliams, J.** (Nov. 2009*). What is Assessment for? Creating Participatory Classrooms for Readers and Writers.* National Writing Project Convening: Digital Is...., Philadelphia, PA.

Honeyford, M., Rupert, R., **McWilliams, J.,** & Sykes, L. (Nov. 2009). *Reading in a Participatory Culture: New Media Literacy Practices and Discursive Assessment Strategies for Critical and Creative Engagement with Classic Texts.* National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention, Philadelphia, PA.

McWilliams, J. (Oct. 2009). *Participatory Assessment for New & Traditional Literacies: Positioning Assessment to Support Participation*. Home, Inc., Biennial Media Literacy Conference, Boston, MA.

Honeyford, M., Rupert, R., & **McWilliams, J.** (Oct. 2009). *The "Rise of Writing": Meeting the Challenges of Researching, Teaching, and Assessing Writing in a Participatory Culture.* Indiana Teachers of Writing Annual Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

McWilliams, J. (May 2009). *Opening Keynote: Project NML's Teachers' Strategy Guide: What We've Learned.* Project NML Spring Conference: Learning in a Participatory Culture, Cambridge, MA.

McWilliams, J. (Nov. 2008). *What is Reading in a Participatory Culture*? Poster for NCTE Annual Convention: San Antonio, TX.

Reilly, E., & **McWilliams, J.** (August 2008). *Roundtable Discussion.* Salzburg Academy: Salzburg, Austria.

McWilliams, J. (August 2008). Multimedia Presentation: *An Overview of Project New Media Literacies' Teachers' Strategy Guide*. Project NML Teacher Workshop: Cambridge, MA.

McWilliams, J. (Oct. 2007). P*oster Session: Introducing Project New Media Literacies.* Christa McAuliffe Technology Conference, Nashua, NH.

McWilliams, J. (May 2005). *Same as it Ever Was: Class, race, and gender in Romero's Living Dead trilogy.* Colorado State University Graduate Student Conference, Fort Collins, CO.

Teaching Presentations and Workshops

Invited panelist, Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning event, *Associate Instructor Workshop on Classroom Climate*, Indiana University (August 2013).

How to make like an ally: Creating safe spaces in the college classroom. Invited talk for Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL) roundtable: Avoiding student exclusion, fostering classroom inclusion, Indiana University (March 2013).

Interviews

Interview with CBCradio: Spark (March 28, 2010). Computers are hard. Who's to blame? Available at http://www.cbc.ca/spark/2010/03/spark-107-march-28-30-2010/.

Interview with CBCradio: Spark (November 19, 2009). On New Media Literacy: Practical strategies for equipping young learners in a new media age. Available at http://www.cbc.ca/spark/2009/11/full-interview-jenna-mcwilliams-on-new-media-literacy/.

Interview with the BBC: BBC News Hour (May 8, 2009). On Rupert Murdoch, the news pay wall, and the future of print journalism: a conversation with Joshua Benton. Available at http://www.joshuabenton.com/bbcworldservice050809.mp3.

Teaching Experience

Courses taught

Educational Psychology for Elementary Education Majors
Educational Psychology for Secondary Education Majors
Learning in out-of-school contexts / Learning in and with New Media
College Composition—Remedial, Introductory, and Advanced
American Literature
Business Communication
Introduction to Literary Analysis
Creative Writing

Teaching Appointments

Instructor, University of Colorado Spring 2015
EDUC-6368, Adolescent Psychology and Development (graduate-level course for teachers)

Teaching Assistant, Indiana University Summer 2014
EDUC-Y520, Strategies for Educational Inquiry (Survey of qualitative and quantitative methods for graduate-level education majors)

Associate Instructor, Indiana University Fall 2011-Spring 2014
EDUC-P251: Educational Psychology for Elementary Education Majors (taught 7 sections).
EDUC-P250: General Educational Psychology (learning in out-of-school contexts) (taught 1 section).
EDUC-P250: General Educational Psychology (survey course) (taught 1 section).

Senior Lecturer, Suffolk University Fall 2005-Spring 2007
C101, College Composition (6 sections)
*C103 American Literature (3 sections)

Lecturer, Bridgewater State College Fall 2006-Spring 2007
COMP102, Advanced Composition (3 sections)
COMP101, Basic Composition (1 section**)**

Lecturer, Newbury College Fall 2005-Summer 2006
C99, Basic Composition (1 section)
C100, College Composition (2 sections)
C115, Business Communications (1 section)
C120, Literature & Interpretation (1 section)

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Colorado State University Fall 2003-Spring 2005
COCC150, College Composition (4 sections)
E210, Introduction to Creative Writing (1 section)

Creative Writing Instructor, Literacy Through Poetry Program Fall 2002-Spring 2004
Taught creative writing workshops to at-risk elementary school students throughout the Poudre School District in Fort Collins, CO.

Writing Consultant, Colorado State University Fall 2002-Spring 2003
Served as a writing tutor helping undergraduate, graduate-level, and foreign and ESL students and non-students develop, organize, and focus academic, creative, and professional writing.

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

Achasa Beechler Dissertation Scholarship. Award for outstanding dissertation research, February 2014.

Indiana University Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology. Associate Instructor of the Year Award, March 2013.

Frieda Alice Renfro Fellowship. Award in support of dissertation research, March 2013.

Indiana University Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology. Award for outstanding student research, March 2013.

Point Foundation. Selection as semifinalist for LGBTQ scholar-activist scholarship, March 2013.

American Educational Research Association (AERA), Division C. National selection to Division C Graduate Student Seminar, AERA Annual Meeting, San Francisco. April 2013.

SERVICE

Transgender Advocacy Group, Indiana University. Member of a university-wide group focusing on education and advocacy for trans*-related issues in higher education. January 2014-present.

AERA Cultural-Historical Special Interest Group. Communications Chair, 2012-present.

Indiana University Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Speakers Bureau. Panelist, invited speaker on transgender issues and LGBTQ issues in education, Jan. 2011-present.

Indiana University Learning Sciences Graduate Student Association (LSGSA):

- Student Liaison to the Faculty, 2011-2012
- President, Recruitment Chair, 2010-2011
- Secretary, Professional Development Chair, 2009-2010
- Web administrator, LSGSA website (http://www.indiana.edu/~lsgsa/index.html), Jan. 2010-Sept. 2012.
- Social co-chair, LSGSA World Domination Task Force, 2009-2011

HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Sciences, & Technology Advanced Collaborative). HASTAC Scholar, 2010-2012

AFFILIATIONS

American Educational Research Association
Division C—Learning & Instruction
Division G—Social Contexts of Education
Division L—Educational Policy and Politics
Special Interest groups:

027—Critical Examination of Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Gender in Education
030—Cultural-Historical Research
039—Learning Sciences
065—Media, Culture, & Curriculum
060—Queer Studies
082—Qualitative Research
137—Writing & Literacies
National Council of Teachers of English
Literacy Research Association
American Association of University Women